

THE SHEEPFOLD

LAURENCE HOUSMAN



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“She walks, the lady of my delight,
A shepherdess of sheep”

THE SHEEPFOLD

THE STORY OF A SHEPHERDESS AND
HER SHEEP AND HOW SHE LOST THEM

BY

LAURENCE HOUSMAN



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FOREWORD

HUMAN life is but a road, and when its story comes to be written, may be shown in two ways : either as encountered by the pedestrian one piece at a time, without foresight of what lies beyond, or from a more elevated and bird's-eye point of view, embracing the two extremes, and telling even at the beginning something of what waits at the end.

In some lives death plays so small and unimportant a part that no dramatic purpose is served by holding its record till after ; and as to Jane Sterling's end, readers who shall care at all about her life need not be kept in doubt. Her history is a past history, and she no longer breathes the air of this visible world wherein once she took delight.

It is enough here to say that she died as she lived, happy, conscious of no enmity either in fate or in her fellow-men, and not finding in solitude that proof of failure which, for one who had been a leader of men, some might suppose it to be. In her passage through life, which contained for her so many pedestrian miles, Jane found special contentment in certain things, simple yet of mysterious attraction : winding roads with broad margins of green, fields of corn, thatched house-roofs with the chitter of nestlings under their eaves, and the clink of the blacksmith's hammer at the forge. To such things she had been born, and they remained with her at her death.

These loves had their main association in two separate localities, one in the east of England, the other in the west, belonging respectively to her childhood and her approach into age ; for though nomadic during the more active and proselytizing period of her life, at its two ends she was sedentary—settled, that is to say, in fixed and narrow surroundings.

With these two periods were associated habitations little allied in appearance or the purpose for which they stood, yet with a homeliness common to both : the one a small whitewashed chapel joined to an older dwelling-house and set in a plot of ground half graveyard half garden ; the other an old brick barn, which above her quiet tenancy of it fell gradually into decay—so bettering, by its admission of light, her acquaintance with heaven. In the former she worshipped, at the bidding of others, a strange God till she could stand no more of him ; in the latter one so intimately her own that from the light of that presence no thought of departure was possible, nor was its radiance diminished in the days when sight grew dim. And this history is but to tell how, on the road of life, she travelled from the temple of her first local deity to find the other not so much awaiting her at the journey's end as actually accompanying her upon the road. From that end, when she reached it, she looked back and saw clearly that even where the former had ostensibly held sway, her own God had been with her, concealing the express image of his person behind a mask of hollow-eyed grimace which to others had stood for very nature and substance. To both in turn she had given the same name, to both the worship of lips trained to traditional forms, and in the service of both had found and lost again the companionship of her fellow-men.

The measure of earth's passing acquaintance with her may here be set down, since nowhere else shall you find it in wood or stone. She was born in the year 1820, and in 1884 she died. The earlier event was recorded in two places only—the parish register of Mutton-in-the-Marsh, and the family Bible of her father Mr. John Mattock, blacksmith and wheelwright. The later event was noted with brief comment in a few daily papers and two of the religious weeklies. None gave more than a paragraph to a name which had then ceased to hold interest ; for when Jane died none of her following remained to her. The day was when her voice had been like a kindling of fire ; men's eyes had shone with it, denominational chapels had thrown open their doors, and crowds had gathered to listen to her.

But a time came when with hearts hardened to her doctrine, they would hear no more. Bereft of her following she made no struggle to regain it. "If they want me they will come; the Lord will lead them," she said; and staying unregarded in the place where she had been almost worshipped, she passed quickly out of remembrance, becoming instead of a celebrity a local oddity, attractive to the passing tourist, but not otherwise important or conducive to trade.

It was told afterwards by one who remembered her in her palmy days, that her eyes were very dark and piercing, and that she seemed to see through a man as she talked with him. Some people, for that reason, avoided her; and no doubt had she lived in earlier times she would have been burnt as a witch. She was tall, angular, and very thin; her mouth, in the quaint phrase of a local witness, was "as wide across as her two eyes"; and "when she smiled at you she had all of her teeth up to the last." At forty, broad wings of white were already showing in the dark hair above her temples, and spread rapidly in the years after. At fifty she was as grey as most women are at seventy, but her locks were still abundant, and except for the occasional covering of a shawl were the only head-dress she wore.

One who remembers her best in those late years of decline and retirement was a small child at the time; and her visits to the oracle were secret and surreptitious. But she remembers well the high-grassed and flowery enclosure of the coverless barn, the low wooden hut with its green canvas roof, the white goat munching indiscriminately at grass and flowers, and the tall shadow-like woman who without conversation gave company, letting the child talk to her of all the things it liked under the sun.

Because at that time the recluse had grown chary of speech, the neophyte remembers the better now some of the things Jane said to her—disjointed as set down here, yet with that sort of sequence which comes from a character that has found itself. This is one of them: "The world? Ah, it's a beautiful place so far as it goes. But for them as

travels it stops short : another step and it's gone." And here is another : "Look in your old granny's eyes, and you'll see in them a dozen children too tired to play ; but not asleep—oh no !"

Of these sayings the actual occasion is seldom remembered. But one evening, bright after summer rain, the old woman accompanied the child to the gate of her ruined dwelling, and pointing toward the heavens cried with soft urgency : "Look at the light, child, look at the light !" And the child, gazing up, saw and felt the peculiar beauty of the expanding scene ; but remembered chiefly and above all the reflection of it on the worn, lined, and happy face that stooped in gentle communion to hers.

From that face of age, dead now these thirty years, we come back to tell of Jane at a time much more remote when she herself was a child.

BOOK I

HER YOUTH

CHAPTER I

THE REWARD OF VIRTUE

OVER the low country round Mutton-in-the-Marsh five roads stretch out like elongated fingers, holding loosely together a scattered community, agricultural in character and living largely upon kind. Into the market-town of Shadbury, five miles distant, housewives dip every Saturday for their weekly shoppings, drink a glass of customers' sherry at the counters they most regularly frequent, and so fare back refreshed, carrying upon their arms the weekly purchase of provender.

Even at the present day Mutton has but two shops of its own. Ninety years ago it had none; and the wheelwright's shed at the cross-roads a furlong from the village was the only spot where industry took other form than in the slow-going labour of farm or mill.

The wheelwright's shed and shoeing-forge had the vantage of two main roads. About it stood grouped a couple of labourers' cottages, the village pound, and a small chapel with dwelling-house extending from its rear.

Here, now and then, amid the more regular shoeing of horses and mending of wagon-wheels, coaches would stop for repair; and the flat-faced chapel, with its side graveyard shadowed by yew and backed by a bright flower-garden, would become an object of momentary interest to passing travellers. Sometimes they would ask to what religious body it belonged, and being told "to the Primitive Brethren," would remain perhaps uninstructed—so little

was the sect then known—viewing with rather more contempt its low and mean proportions that lacked the instinct for self-advertisement.

Yet to themselves the Primitive Brethren were an important people; and to them, as to others, insignificant in whatever else, persecution had come in the past to give justification. Poor in this world's goods they were rich in their own esteem, and in confident expectation of a Heaven strictly limited to the numbers of their own community, secure of automatic salvation by a regenerative doctrine wherein evil could find no place.

But when men are thus made safe by the revealed word, conduct becomes unimportant. And so, in their outward life and habits, the Primitive Brethren were much as other men are; but inwardly there was a difference, and in their chapel services they bore witness to it once a week, when the men prayed and testified each in turn, and the women sat silent, having upon their heads that covering of fear prescribed to them by St. Paul.

At seven years of age the children, who like the rest of us had been born in sin, made public profession of a desire to be born again, and thereupon by watery induction received their souls and became changed from the natural man to the spiritual—water and the spirit, in the apparent proportion (for the immersion was total) of ninety-nine parts to one, presiding over the operation, which being performed with many chilly incantations from the assembled elders was immediately followed by full admission to church-membership. Thereafter the boys were allowed to possess their souls in speech—if so the spirit moved them: the girls in patience. For to that end had they been born.

The Primitive Brethren could boast no day-school of their own, but in their chapel they made up on Sundays, as far as possible, for what was denied them during the week. Children in those days went either to church or dame school, paying some pence a week for the former privilege and only one for the latter; and the small P.B.'s, coming on Sundays to their own premises, were cleansed morning and afternoon from sectarian influences, and stamped with the

principles of Primitive Brotherhood. In order to demonstrate results, prize-givings were held yearly, when regularity, docility, and credulity were suitably rewarded with texts of the revealed word, "Good Shepherd's Calendars," or illustrated literature, depicting how bad ends were to be eschewed and good ends gained.

In the year 1826 this function took place on a cold winter's evening near the beginning of December at the hour of six. The chapel was then as full as it could hold: a satisfying odour of packed humanity, and a pleased murmur of voices adding to the impression of warmth suggested by the smell of burnt stove-pipe.

The extra ceremony was due to the social distinction of the individual who officiated as prize-giver. Certainly he was a great catch for so small and humble a congregation—a real live General, though a retired one; and the children were much impressed by him. Even outsiders, people not of Primitive persuasion, had come to look at him, and from his present appearance form judgment upon his past.

For this man had fought under Wellington—had come face to face with Bonaparte, at a respectful distance which under his generalship had not diminished, had conducted an expeditious retreat with heavy attendant losses, had been mentioned in dispatches rather unfavourably as a consequence, and thereafter in the dull boredom of compulsory retirement had found salvation. Among so small a community as the Primitive Brethren his lost importance was restored to him.

At the inaugural hour the door of the chapel was shut and the air made tight; and any who came late had to knock to be let in—a custom which had survived from the days of persecution. Then an elder stood up with folded hands and prayed, and all the grown-up people shut their eyes, being able to see God so much better in the dark; and the children tried to shut theirs, but could seldom do it symmetrically—or only in brief spasms, the interests of life being too much for them. Then, when the General got up to speak, they all opened them again.

He was very tall, and from the low platform on which he

stood his head seemed almost to touch the round black ventilator that hung over it like a halo. His remarks were lengthy, but they were not fluent; and when he seemed to be nearing conclusions he drew off and began afresh, thus showing a likeness in his oratory to those operations which had unenviably distinguished him upon the field of battle. When presently he came to speak of his warrior-days, it was with an air of gentle detachment, as though partly disapproving and yet condoning them.

"I was a man of blood," he said. "David was a man of blood too; yet we are told that he was a man after the Lord's own heart. I hope I am; I hope that all of us are—little boys and little girls as well. Yes, even little girls—for we are told in the Scriptures to be strong and quit us *like men*, which shows that in this world men are the type of what God wishes us to be. But that only means in spirit; and being in the spirit is different to being in the world—you must always remember that. Even John, who saw Revelations, was only in the spirit on the Lord's day, and then he saw things quite differently from at other times. And Elijah was in the spirit when he fled into the wilderness, and Philip after he had baptized the eunuch; and Saul when he was found among the prophets. What we do when we are in the spirit man may blame us for; but we can't help doing it because it is the Lord's Will. And when the Lord calls us it is no use running away, because He always comes after us. Adam ran away and hid himself, but that did not save him from the Curse. Jonah tried to hide too, but he got swallowed by the whale: and if we do likewise there is a whale waiting for every one of us, wrathfully displeased at us and ready to swallow us up quick. Oh, I hope that nobody in this room will run away when the Lord calls him; if he does he will not get any of the prizes of Heaven, but only fire and torment and outer darkness, so that he will wish he had never been born."

That was the gist of the old General's delivery but he gave it at much greater length and with many sentences that had no end to them. And when he had finished the children were called up before him to be catechized.

They stood in tight rows and answered in a sharp gnat-like wail while revealed truth was extracted from them in choice morsels ; and those who at this final judgment made no mistakes got prizes. To that old man of blood they dropped extra deep curtsies, or gave an added pull to their forelocks when he spoke to them, staring at him with all their eyes the while, even as at a country fair one stares at the wild beasts grown tame within their cages, and thinks with a secret relish of their past records of crime.

He was a nice old Primitive Brother to look at, very thin and sallow and white-haired, and what he lacked in chin he made up in nose ; and every framed text he gave away he looked at and read aloud, and said how nice it would be to hang up over the head of one's bed to remind one that God was there. And when he came to the calendars he said that Time was a little grain of sand in the wilderness of Eternity, and that we must be careful of it and water it, and make it fruitful so that it might grow. And coming to the books, which were the bigger prizes, he gave out their titles just as he had done with the texts ; some of them he said he had read, and some he had not, but was quite sure they were all excellent : the beautiful titles themselves told him that.

He was a talkative old prize-giver ; and taking an individual interest in all, he kept some of the children standing quite a long time—the boys very sheepish and doubtful which leg to stand on, or which hip to put a fist to, the girls bursting with the curtsy which they had to deliver the moment book or framed text touched their hands.

One little girl, kept anxiously waiting too long, dropped hers and broke the glass at the very moment that it was given her. The old General was quite nice about it ; there was many a slip, he said, between the cup and the lip, and this was only one of them. Then he took back the text and read it once again : "Thou God seest me," and told the little girl always to remember that, when about to fall into sin, for souls were as brittle as glass and once broken couldn't be mended. Then he gave her sixpence to buy a new glass, and before she got rid of herself she had

dropped quite half a dozen curtsies and fled back to her place in a prickly heat of nervousness at the publicity with which her poor small life had been lacerated.

All this was watched from afar by the all-seeing and anxious gaze of a little girl aged six, very daintily made, with thin hands that constantly squeezed each other, dark eyes and neatly braided hair. She herself was not one of the prize-winners, for at that time her full dip into church-membership, followed by regular attendance at Sunday-school, still lay in the future. But this lack of an active share in the distribution of reward seemed rather to increase than to diminish her interest.

As candidates for honour approached the platform her eye followed with an intense solicitude their onward and upward course, her countenance composed to the reverential expression proper for a prize-winner to assume, and her hands held ready for the receipt of the beautiful favour about to be bestowed. At the preliminary curtsy of the girls her knees made the shadow of a genuflexion, and for blundering boys her head delicately adumbrated the right manner of bow. Their parting reverence and withdrawal from the platform brought a moment of relief, and happiness shone on her face flushed with the excitement of an ordeal so intimately shared. Few of the prize-winners satisfied that high standard of deportment the vision of which lay in her soul, many caused disappointment and vexation; but with each fresh comer immortal hope sprang in her breast, and returned with undiminished ardour to the charge. Long before the ceremony was over she had become a double adept in prize-givings, and could, had he consulted her, have given the old General some very good advice.

Here we get our first sight of Jane. Among a group of seated elders she stood erect, elevated (the better to see) on a small wooden footstool. Rapt in her sense of social responsibility, she remained unconscious of the parental hand holding her, unconscious, in a way, of all but herself, and those whose goings she so earnestly strove to shepherd in right ways.

Mother and child were decently habited in black, for at that time Mr. John Mattock had but recently entered Heaven, and the smith's forge at the cross-roads had passed in consequence to other hands.

If to be in bliss is to be in Heaven, Jane was nearer then to the parent spiritually removed than to the one whose earthly services she retained. When prize-giving was over she descended as from a great height, and heard almost as it were a stranger's, her mother's voice bidding her quick home to bed.

She did as she was told, and all the bliss of that hot and crowded scene went with her as she emerged to the night, and, standing solitary, saw frost and moonlight sparkling on the tumbled graves and the shadowy patch of garden lying beyond. Her spirit was full; unaware as yet of what it meant she held in her hands the gift of her inheritance, destined in the future to give so rich a colour to life and lead her through strange turmoil into paths of peace.

Jane went home, having taken all the prizes. Incidentally she had also given them : the crowded room had been peopled by a hundred Janes.

CHAPTER II

JANE RECEIVES HER SOUL

JANE'S home and the chapel stood back to back ; and strange murmurs of worship, exuding at intervals through the partition-wall, were the earliest hint to her childish consciousness of man's communion with his Maker.

These first intimations of immortality had a mysterious attraction : they belonged to something unknown and unseen. As a natural consequence her mind tried to picture them ; and thenceforth all that touched on the religious side of life she adorned, giving to abstract ideas concrete images, and to all things material a significance spiritual in character.

One of her earliest recollections was saying her prayers to a wooden chair-back—a deity not of her own choosing, but her mother's. Before Jane's mind grew critical of it, habit might have paled its significance : but having one day been tied into the chair for disobedience, she found solace for the humiliation by investing it with a certain character and will of its own.

That day, sitting aloof at her mending nearer the fire, “Kneel down, Jane,” said her mother, “and say your prayers.” The chair of punishment was indicated ; and Jane, who till that moment had been thinking very possessively of other things, yielded herself to the discipline with a quickened appreciation of its punitive character.

Although perhaps not consciously, prayer at these fixed and stated intervals was repugnant to her instinct for mental freedom. Refusal to pray when her elders thought fit had before now brought whippings, and had not made her love God any better, or fear Him more undividedly than

before. The assumption that a child is in the right mood for prayer because it is being sent to bed or is being made to get up again, has doubtless given many a repulse to divinity from hearts not otherwise averse. Hitherto the interest of prayer for Jane had lain less in the words or in their intended recipient than in the relation subsisting then, and at no other time, between herself and a wooden seat left vacant. Now the vacaney implied a presence, the chair having acquired, if not a personality, a certain symbolism of its own.

To this chair, a few hours ago, her body still tingling with punishment had been compulsorily attached. Fixing her eyes upon its plain and severe anatomy she began praying aloud, and the routine words, which hitherto had merely passed through her mind like rubble through a sieve, were on this occasion consciously and resentfully directed to the chair-back.

This back was of unpolished wood, and carried three cross-staves in addition to the flat bar along the top. It was different from the other chairs in the house, and did not in fact belong to it: it had come from the chapel to be mended, and was waiting to go back again.

The chapel was already known to Jane as a place where people became curiously unlike themselves and obtuse to each other's existence. Once or twice she had been admitted to its Sunday services, and had there been confronted by a great noise proceeding out of men's mouths, greater than she had ever heard before—sometimes made by one, sometimes by all; and soon she perceived that the words given forth were similar in kind to those used by herself when she "said her prayers."

This discovery had evoked a responsive chirrup from her own lips, which—coming in a pause of the proceedings—brought down on her an admonitory shove, and a swift order to "hush"; for she had yet to learn that among the P.B.'s audible praying by women was impermissible.

The next time she went to chapel, after praying to the chair-back, her observation was more focused. She then saw that everybody prayed to chair-backs. To each

worshipper a chair-back was apportioned, and to that he attuned himself. Some sat resting their foreheads against it; some put their arms round it and pressed it to their bosoms; some—mostly the women-folk—knelt aloof and looked down on its top with a grave and considerate regard. But they all paid to it some degree of attention.

Presently, from the waste of words that went on around her, she began to pick up certain phrases and to sense a meaning in them. The “seats of bliss,” the “great white throne,” and the twelve other thrones accompanying it began to acquire a definite importance, and the humble praying-chair at home became the lowest link in a long chain mounting steadily to the perfect ideal. The three staves which, as she prayed, formed a frontal to her outlook, were the steps of an ascent leading heavenward; “Jacob’s Ladder” entered her vision, as an elongated chair-back many octaves high, up which the angels went harping with their toes till through a blaze of celestial light they passed to glory.

In the track of these bright visitants Jane’s prayers toiled humbly and often in vain. The first stave was directed to her own tendencies toward evil, the second to the goodness of her parents—in whom no evil tendencies were to be predicated—and the third to the goodness of God. In these concrete aids and images her soul found zest and satisfaction, like a creeping plant which, eager for growth, puts forth passionate feelers this way and that, till it finds a framework to rest on.

The chair having been mended went back to the chapel, and mingling with the rest was lost in the general herd. But its influence remained; and through the after-life of her childhood the back of a chair continued to embody for Jane that beauty of holiness to the discovery of which, even in those early days, her spirit was adventurously setting forth.

The moral sense afflicted Jane at an earlier age than most, and she began to have searchings of heart. But these were only growing-pains, for at that time she had not received her soul. The occasion for that new birth would

not arrive till her seventh year, when "conversion" was to be expected of her; after which the ordinances of Primitive Brotherhood would make the operation complete and satisfactory.

The receptacle wherein the divine overshadowing was destined to take place was a large zinc-lined bath sunk in the chapel floor to one side of the preacher's platform. Ordinarily a lid covered it from view, and chairs stood over it. Before she had ever looked therein Jane had sensed a mystery, and her prophetic mind had become aware of a lurking peril. One Saturday morning, as she helped her mother clean out the chapel, she crossed the lid from which the chairs had been moved, and noticed how hollow a sound her feet made on it. The instinct to tread down Satan being strong in her blood she began running to and fro across it; then, stimulated by its pleasant degree of elasticity, started to jump. "Don't do that!" warned her mother, "or you'll go through."

"What's there?" inquired Jane, stopping short.

"Never you mind what's there!" replied Mrs. Mattock. "You'll know time enough."

Jane drew cautiously away, and thereafter trod softly or went compass-wise. But she did not think the less about it. Before long her question became frequent, and hardened into a habit; and Mrs. Mattock would still answer that it was no concern of hers—not yet at any rate. But a day came when thinking to improve the occasion, since Jane had been naughty the night before, she added grimly: "It's there where black sinners goes to be washed white in the blood of the Lamb, God helping 'em. And when your turn for it comes, I shall have something to be thankful for."

Jane stood very still and considered for a while. "Shall I like it, Mother?" she inquired.

"It won't be a question of 'like'" was the reply: "it's what's good for you." At this information Jane's disfavour for the operation increased, from that lack of alternative her sinful nature rebelled. Thereafter her respect for the covered hole was mingled with aversion, and whenever

possible she avoided setting foot on it, having a fear lest some day it might open and swallow her up in blood—a prospect from which her cleanly soul shrank instinctively, not yet seeing the connexion. Coming at a later day on the lid laid open, she beheld for the first time its dark interior. Much dust had accumulated, and as it was to be used the next day Mrs. Mattock was cleaning it. Water laboriously carried to it in pails was run out again by a tap in the kitchen wall, and presently Jane was instructed to go round and draw it off. It came very black and grouty, giving colour to her imagination that here were concentrated the sins of those who in the past had gone down to be washed. What depth of blackness in herself might not the process reveal when her turn came! She began to think of herself now as having a black inside, and some days knew this to be true, a concrete imagery of the presence of sin having now become so natural to her conscience that she could think of it in no other way.

A day later she saw the water that had been used for the ceremony run off in large quantities, neither so black nor so red as her fancy had painted it. This gave her mind some relief, but she continued to ask abrupt questions which Mrs. Mattock could not or did not answer satisfactorily.

“Mother, where will the blood come from?” was one of them. And Mrs. Mattock, answering somewhat as Abraham answered his too inquisitive son when on the road to sacrifice, secured respite now and then to actual interrogation, but not to the sense that her daughter was, in curiosity at all events, getting theologically ahead of her.

She began to think that the sooner it was done the better, and informing the elders of her offspring’s coming-on disposition, secured for her the unusual honour of baptism at the age of six and a half instead of seven.

Jane went to it with great dread mingled with courage, and without a sound let herself be lifted down into the pit from which at that moment she scarcely thought to emerge alive. She submitted to her first dipping in a compressed and shuddering silence, hoping that within her tight clenched eyes a vision of Heaven would dawn; but the second and

the third dipping unnerved her, for the water was unkindly cold. Horror seized her, and the cries of weak nature broke loose. "You brutes!" she cried, "you devils!" as the forcing hands compelled her violently again and again to untold depths of grace. The third expression that she used in her extremity may not here be set down; probably in no place of worship had it ever been delivered before with so loud and piercing a distinctness, or so full a faith in its descriptive truth.

Acts followed words: reaching her highest, Jane smote the minister under the fifth rib with all her strength—but it was too late; in spite of indecorous language and angry blows the deed was done; washed clean of sin and made fit for the bliss of full membership in Primitive Brotherhood, Jane returned to the well's brink a shuddering and agitated object, with sharply chattering teeth and bosom rent by sobs. In this spirit she received her new-born soul, and the burden of it went forth with her from that pit of darkness to be her inseparable companion through life.

Mrs. Mattock wrapped her in a blanket and bore her swiftly away from the assembly to her own home. And "You *were* a naughty girl!" were the first words of which Jane became properly conscious after this her first entry into a state of grace.

So with bitter humiliation and a deep sense of ignominy and shame she started upon the heavenly way which had been devised for her by others. The only redeeming feature in the whole experience was the total and unexpected absence of blood. There was also a relieved sense that the thing was over and done: never would it have to occur again.

The performing elder, however, believed that he had done a good day's work, seeing that from so small a framework of humanity so powerful a devil had been cast out. For in the course of her struggles Jane had bitten him. Never in all Primitive Brotherhood had he known such a thing to happen before.

CHAPTER III

ROOT AND BRANCH

FOR a brief period of her existence Jane had been esteemed a weakling, and at a time when she was far too young to know what was being done to her, slugs and turpentine had been rubbed into her back to strengthen it.

The spirit of the turpentine apparently entered her system, but not the slugs. A devouring spirit of cleanliness remained with her through life; and when much later it took a moral course for its satisfaction, it carried her far.

This sense was greatly afflicted in early years by her mother's careful custom of sewing her into her clothes for the winter as a protection against cold. During this season of cloistral internment Jane's body became the habitat of an amazing number of fleas. From the permitted openings at throat and waist she probed desperately to get at them; and committing them to certain death in her own way, was not unfamiliar with their taste, though cleanly scruples caused her to eject them unswallowed.

At other times, left to her own devices in an empty house, she poured in water, or the warm remains of tea, hoping thereby to drown them. For these unexplained wettings she received the correction that was due, but learned not to mind it since the counter-irritant thus locally established served as a relief. One day, greatly daring, being of an age when she could sew herself up again, she slit the stitches, and took a surreptitious wash at the clothes-tub. "Foul I to the fountain fly" had then a more practical meaning for her than before—previously she had thought that it only referred to the drinking habits of cocks and hens.

It was in this struggle for cleanliness that Jane first

began concealing things from her mother, feeling her dim way to that higher law than parental authority—the unalienable residuum of right (indefensible in logic and too spiritual for definition in words), at which every soul of true standing must sooner or later arrive.

Gradually she became aware by experiment that her own and not her mother's was sometimes the better way, more especially in those things which were really, or in the main, her own concern.

In the matter of prayer she came early to hold proprietary views, insisting on right of control over the wording of her petitions, and praying for all living or inanimate things which attracted her. One day, bidden to seek forgiveness for a fault laid wrongly to her charge, she closed obstinate lips, and bore the implacable punishment her integrity brought on her with so uncanny a fortitude as finally to evoke in Mrs. Mattock's mind—no qualms of conscience, but a fear lest the child had not come into the world with her right wits.

As a result of that conflict, painfully won, Jane's Deity began to show a fissiparous tendency, separating himself from the low chair-backed herd to which previously he had belonged, and revealing to her the more ladder-like form by which later she was to ascend to Heaven.

The point was a crucial one: Jane, convinced of her inner right, had rebelled; and because she had done so the eye of God shone on her. This established a confidential relation, from which grew communings that needed no form of words to give them strength, and strange upliftings of heart exercised in solitude. The empty chapel became a place of assignation.

There she would betake herself when her mother's back was turned, and find in its aspect of fixed vacancy something of an apocalyptic character. The plain bare room, with its rows of empty chairs, had then an air of solemn expectancy, as though awaiting revelation and a sign; and Jane would sit waiting for it till fear of discovery drove her forth, or, tiring of so passive a rôle, would conduct for her own edification a miniature service, imitating with inarticu-

late mumblings the lift and fall of the preacher's voice, and drumming on a wooden book-rest the imagined hymn-tunes she dared not sing aloud. And if by ill-chance her mother came to look for her, there were always the loose leaves of hymn-books to be sorted into place, chairs waiting to be dusted, or strewn hairpins to be collected from the floor below : excuse sufficient, if not to escape reproof, at least to avert exposure of the spiritual dissipation she was out to indulge.

At that time it might be said that she only saw God in secret and by stealth, her religious sense developing mainly on the lines of an intense and introspective individualism ; her social sense, purely secular in its direction, not having yet become joined to it. Before long, however, her feeling for beauty and an instinctive attraction toward all things animate and bright became the medium through which her faith emerged from chrysalis form. One of her first theological discoveries upon these lines was the fact that a green leaf viewed first with the sunlight on it, and then with the sunlight through it, presented colours of a very different quality, and that the latter was the more vivid revelation of the two ; geranium leaves especially being far more beautiful when you looked through them than when you looked at them. Here in rudiment was the method of character-reading which in later life she applied to her social work, when, looking for God through her penitents, she found in the rays which were absorbed a better and more hopeful vision than in those which were merely deflected from the surface they struck.

Jane's cottage had paper blinds, a local anticipation of a fashion which only became prevalent at a much later date, and due probably to the fact that there was then at Shadbury a paper-factory giving employment to several score of hands. These blinds were of an orange-tawny, suggestive of thunder-storm, and crackled ominously to the touch. Often was Jane warned by her mother not to tear them. She found them a rather troublesome luxury, for as they grew old they became brittle and any sprinkling of moisture made them cockle so that they would not roll straight.

When Jane watered the window-geraniums the blinds had to be rolled up for the process and then let down again to keep out the sun. Time tainted, but did not mellow them ; flies blew on them in small black spots, and when with much-frayed edges they had outlived their use in the kitchen-parlour below, they passed in cut-down form to smaller windows upstairs.

One day when a new blind had come into the house and was still looking beautiful, Jane pricked on it with a large pin the words : " God is love," and was well whipped for her infant piety. But " God is love " remained for several years letting pin-holes of sunshine through to the geraniums, much to Jane's satisfaction,; and was still there presiding over the scene when, on a memorable Sunday afternoon, Jane's childhood for all practical purposes ended and life of another character began.

On the side where chapel and cottage wall faced south, and at the point where graveyard changed to garden, stood a yew-tree, within the shade of whose branches lay a well. From this the household drew all its supplies, its drinking-water as well, for in those days sanitary inspectors did not abound, and the investigation of cause and effect had not begun to extend scientific excuses to the inscrutable ways of Providence.

Mr. John Mattock, the wheelwright, had found his last resting-place less than a dozen yards from the well's mouth, which, though he had not fallen into it, had probably been the cause of his death ; and his daughter Jane would bring water from that parent source of ill to bedew the flowers which she and her mother had planted upon his grave.

The tombstone epitaphs of deceased Brethren had two things invariably in common : they rehearsed the virtues of the departed and were confidently expectant of a speedy resurrection. The rising again of the buried body was a fundamental tenet of Primitive faith, and when relegated to their coffins its members were dressed accordingly, men and women alike, robed in the white marriage-garments of the Lamb. So, bridally arranged, Jane had seen her father for the last time, his black beard massive upon his

chest, and so remembered, from the previous year, her old grandmother in a lace cap elaborately starched and frilled for that great ceremonial gathering of the elect which lay ahead. Jane had no doubt whatever that as she had seen them go so also she would see them return ; and when birds died, and mice or kittens were murdered, she took their small bodies and planted them in contiguous soil, trusting that the saintly influences of the locality would cause the uncovenanted mercies of Heaven to extend to these also, when at the sound of the last trump the dead were raised.

That she herself would be alive to the occasion Jane had very little reason to doubt. The Primitive Brotherhood lived in a constant expectation of great events, whose main effect would be to demonstrate to rival communities that closer intimacy with the divine scheme of things which the P.B.'s had always claimed for themselves ; and at this very time with which we are now dealing, printed leaflets had been issued from the society's centre, reassuring the faithful that the Day was not far off.

For at least a week after the receipt of this portentous reaffirmation of previous but now belated prophecies, Mrs. Mattock would look out of window the last thing at night to see whether the Kingdom of Heaven was coming, and if by ten o'clock no sign showed went comfortably to bed.

Gradually she dropped the habit ; but Jane, with a mind more tenacious of spiritual mysteries, continued to treasure the expectation. Less than a month later it accompanied her to the annual fair at Shadbury, where while waiting with her mother for admission to one of the shows she suddenly began praying.

By a combination of fervour and habit she prayed a little audibly.

"What are you muttering so for?" inquired Mrs. Mattock.

"I was praying," said Jane.

"Bless the child ! Whatever are you praying for now of all times," exclaimed her mother impatiently.

“ I was praying,” said Jane, “ that the Day of Judgment shouldn’t come till I’d seen the fat man.”

Her mother stared at her. “ That isn’t a proper sort of thing to pray about,” she said.

“ But we want to see him, don’t we ? ”

“ You can do that without praying.”

“ But how is one to know ? It may come like a thief in the night.”

“ Well, it isn’t night now—so that’s all about it ! ” said her mother, cutting her short. People had begun listening to the conversation.

The more closely Jane came to associate her religion with life, the more by her uncompromising relevance did she shock people. Before long attendance at chapel in this spirit brought her into trouble. Things that happened there sometimes made her laugh ; and laughter was not allowed : neither were tears except in relation to the eloquence of the preacher, or to a sense of sin either in oneself or others.

One Sunday afternoon Jane went to chapel without her mother, who had gone to nurse a neighbour in sickness. With a sense of enlargement arising from a greater freedom to look about her and observe things unchecked, she sat in her accustomed seat and watched the summer sunlight making a pleasant pattern of window-panes along the dingily whitewashed wall. Before her eye a long black stove-pipe soared slantingly to the roof, and going forth to the brightness of the outer world drew Jane’s thoughts thitherward. Hearing aloft the pleasant chitter of starlings her spirit went up to join them, and taking thereafter a bird’s-eye view of things below was only partially aware of the short but rather dull prayer with which the service opened. The first hymn brought her back to the flesh, she rejoined the congregation, and was then in a more receptive mood for the longer prayer that followed.

Before it was ended, however, a tragic happening to the starlings up in the roof had forcibly reclaimed her attention. The nest, whose chitterings she so plainly heard, had, as the event now proved, been precariously lodged in an upper

kink of the stove-pipe. Possibly the growing weight of the grub-fed family put an overstrain upon its foundations; in any case, whatever the cause, with a soft rustling slither the nest descended the chimney, and bearing with it the whole clamorous brood, found rest at the bottom of the now fireless stove. Against that bed of dust and rubble the precipitated nestlings made loud complaint to the assembled congregation; and the parent-birds on the roof gave vent to agitated cries, or down the stove-pipe sent panic messages that had in them no practical value whatever. And meanwhile in all that praying congregation scarcely a head lifted or turned, and the preacher's voice continued triumphantly and without a break to show forth the praise of the Lord's goodness, and to make mention of his loving-kindness unto men.

The long prayer ran its destined course, and Jane, as she watched the shut eyes and the shaken head, was filled with a piteous wonder how any man's ears could, in spiritual exercise, grow so deaf to the cry of life. To her hearing it hammered like thunder, and her body was vibrant and taut, quivering like a clock whose alarum has been let go.

Before the preacher had finished his prayer Jane hated him with an exceeding hate; a time came when she could no longer believe that he and the congregation did not hear; and as she gazed at those bowed heads and stiffened necks, fire kindled in her heart, and the word of the Lord came to her. She knelt ready charged for the attack, and could feel with a strange distinctness a hand holding her by her hair, till the moment came when she was to be let go.

At last the prayer ended; in a tone replete with satisfaction over testimony faithfully rendered came the concluding "Amen." There followed a decent pause, as with shut eyes the congregation remained bowed, letting the full flavour of its virtue sink into them. At this moment, when pins might drop with every chance of being heard, Jane trembled to her feet. Rapt in her mission of salvation she put off fear. Her inner being—that second identity which often before she had watched and feared

and coaxed temporarily into quiescence—now waxed strong and took possession of the outward frame. Almost against her will she opened her mouth and let the word go forth.

“O God,” cried Jane, “a starling’s nest has fell down the chimney, and they’re all alive!”

Quick and sharp, eyes opened, necks twisted, heads turned. A shocked sound of hushing came from all parts of the chapel.

“O Lord, make haste and deliver them! Don’t let them die!” Quickly and despairingly she threw out the appeal, knowing instinctively that no time was to be lost; what she had to do must be done at once. From a score of familiar eyes, full of indignation and amazement, she saw heavy judgment being passed on her, but lighter than a feather fell its weight.

“Little sister,” said the preacher sternly, “you must be silent in the assembly.”

“But I can hear them young starlings!” pleaded Jane. And plainly enough in that shocked suspension of divine service their lamentations were now audible.

One sitting near, moved perhaps by no higher motive than base curiosity, leaned forward, opened the stove door and looked in. Jane fixed him with yearning eyes, praying compassion into his dull heart.

The minister’s voice recalled the demoralized congregation to its business with the world above. “My brethren,” he said, “let us sing a hymn.” The congregation rose to its feet; harmony flowed; Heaven received once more the attention due to it.

But meanwhile Jane’s prayer did not remain unanswered; the arm of salvation, tentatively stretched out, had not been shortened. It now emerged from the dust and ashes of the stove, bearing a dilapidated nest and a small squirming handful of life.

Casting around with embarrassed eye, the rescuer spied Jane watching him; and she, drawing near to his signal with all speed, received into her lap the living remains and bore them forth into less consecrated air.

The crowns of gold about which the Primitive Brethren

were singing as she made her escape under the solemn gaze of their reproachful eyes, meant nothing to her just then. Metal more attractive lay in her possession—wide mouths with yellow rims brighter than gold; at sight of which the fierce fever of motherhood burned in her blood.

Treasuring them forth, she planted them in an old flower-pot, and fixing it to the fork of a tree had present joy in watching the parents return to recognize in new surroundings the things which belonged to their peace.

When Mrs. Mattock came home and heard what Jane had done she was very much ashamed of her, and wondered how it could ever have come about that child of hers should so greatly misbehave. "Talking in chapel of all places!" she cried in shocked tone. "Whoever did hear the like? And I wonder what your poor father would have thought of you." For thus, when fit words of reprobation fail the living, are the dead invoked.

These comments served but to re-emphasize a parting of the ways which had already begun. Even in cool blood after the event Jane failed to share her mother's grief; and as her conscience became more and more her own she learned that maternal guidance, though it had its place, was not the only way by which Heaven is to be attained.

It was characteristic of Jane's nature that an increased warmth of affection followed upon the discovery of her mother's moral fallibility. Neither then nor later had Jane any special weakness for saints: people of unquestionable goodness did not attract her.

CHAPTER IV

THE TENDER YEARS

JANE'S love affairs began at an early date, forming a rather solemn ingredient in a life otherwise cheerful.

Her first childish devotion was for her Uncle Jim, whom she loved much better than her own father, and was more especially drawn to about the time when mourning for the other, though still operative, had become formal.

He was a dark silent man, quiet even in his tread ; and though he lived only five miles away, she had never been to his house or made the acquaintance of her Aunt Sarah, his wife.

Uncle Jim usually appeared on Saturday evenings burdened with a large market-basket, being then upon his way home ; and Jane, even at so inexperienced an age, was struck by the circumstance that a man possessing a wife should himself do the weekly shoppings.

Along with his general lack of conversation went a habit of body singularly quiet and reposeful. For above an hour at a time he would sit by the kitchen fire motionless, watching sociably all that went on around him, but seldom replying in more than monosyllables when spoken to. So he would wait, attendant on the passing hour, and when the clock struck seven would rise, pick up his basket and start slowly for home.

When left by themselves, he and Jane would sit opposite each other, their eyes making intent company for a while : then Jane would start a subject, and to her probings Uncle Jim would reply meditatively, sometimes with long pauses, but also with a certain relish of the compulsion she laid on him. She brought him difficulties which no one else could

solve for her, and found him, contrary to the usual way with elders, patient over questions he could not answer.

Generally, however, he was very wise, giving slow but straight solutions to the queer problems she propounded. It was a comfort to learn from him that kittens had no souls till their eyes opened, and sharks, tigers, and crocodiles not till they died—sometimes not even then. How, in that case, she asked, did they get them at all? By dying with their mouths open, he told her. And so it was, thereafter, that she saw all sharks, tigers, and crocodiles heave their last sigh, and get quit of the wicked bodies which had been too much for them.

To him, also, she broached an early theological conundrum—What did Methuselah die of? Uncle Jim thought a while, then reckoned that he was drowned in the Flood; and when, later, Jane started arithmetic, and, like her contemporary Bishop Colenso, applied it to Scripture, she found that Uncle Jim had been right—that Methuselah had, at all events, died in the year of the Flood if not in the Flood itself. It seemed probable, therefore, that Noah had left his six times removed great-grandfather to sink or swim; and small wonder was it, when things got settled again, that he drank to drown remorse.

Jane knew vaguely that Uncle Jim was in trouble of spirit; but about his private affairs she did not question him, only watching his face found signs there, and learned them steadily by heart.

He was a tall thin man, showing a good deal of bone about the face and wrists; and the quiet set of his eyes made it always seem as though he were full of thought. One of his habits was to carry in his teeth an unlighted pipe; and though he seldom smoked Jane never saw him without it. When in his most taciturn mood, he would punctuate the prolonged silence by now and then tapping his pipe upon the hob, then insert a finger, and feel in his pocket for tobacco. As a rule the tobacco seemed not to be there, since no filling of the pipe resulted from the action, though he might repeat it a dozen times over.

One day Jane saw him, after long thought, strike his

pipe so hard upon the hob that it broke. He let it lie, saying nothing. This seemed to Jane to need not explanation but comfort : she went across, and resting her hand on his knee stood looking at him. He stroked her hair softly, gazing past her the while, and presently she went back to her place. Then he picked up the pieces of the broken pipe, put them in his pocket and went away without saying anything.

That night in her prayers Jane said, " Please God, mend Uncle Jim's pipe for him ! " It was a child's mistake thus to pray for effect and not for cause ; but she understood well that the breaking of the pipe had meant a great deal.

It meant more as the days and weeks went on, for Uncle Jim did not return ; and Mrs. Mattock, mysteriously agitated, avoided mention of him. When Jane inquired after him, she heard that he had gone to other parts farther away, and would not be coming to Shadbury market any more.

Nevertheless, each Saturday, Jane continued to ask for him, till seeing that her questions were evasively met she let the matter rest. After a month's interval she stopped abruptly in the middle of her prayers to ask again, and this time more demandingly, " Mother, where *is* Uncle Jim ? "

Mrs. Mattock experienced a shock, for in addition to the solemnity of the occasion, Jane's revival of interest on this particular day was strangely justified by happenings elsewhere. Startled from her composure Mrs. Mattock edged nearer to the truth.

" You won't never see your Uncle Jim again," she said shortly. " Go on with your prayers ! "

Jane took a big breath. " Is he dead, Mother ? " she inquired awestruck.

Mrs. Mattock paused before replying. " Yes," she said then, in lack-lustre tone, almost with indifference.

By no sign would Jane show grief where it was not shared. " What did he die of ? " she asked.

" Heart trouble," replied her mother. " And it's no use telling you any more, you wouldn't understand."

Though the rebuff was plain, Jane pressed one more

question before she had done. "Why ain't I in black, Mother?"

To this criticism of convention Mrs. Mattock remained cold. "I can't afford to put you in black for your uncle," she said.

For the time Jane said no more. She went upstairs and looked reproachfully at God out of her bedroom window: why had He not told her before, out of that Heaven so exuberantly spangled with signs? Somewhere up among those stars Uncle Jim was shining down on her, but which of them he was she did not know. Casting around she chose out the one which by the quickness of its glance most attracted her, and until displacement, by an incident which fell later, Sirius became Uncle Jim.

The next day she filched a bit of her mother's crape, and in a broad black band wore her heart upon her sleeve.

"What have you got that on for?" inquired her mother sharply.

"Uncle Jim."

"Just you take it off!" Mrs. Mattock herself removed the offending bandlet. "You can mourn him in your heart as much as you like," was her comment, "but you aren't to make a show of it."

Then, for the last time, Jane attempted to get further particulars. "How did he die, Mother? Did he have pain?"

"No, he just went off quiet-like, same as always. But I wasn't there to see, so I can't tell you more of it. And the less you talk about him the better," she added, as though to clinch the matter to her daughter's too interrogative mind. "You'll never see no more of him now, 'cep' it be his ghost."

That which had been uttered as a threat to cow her to quiescence, Jane took as a hopeful probability: such visualizings from the unseen world had no terror for her.

A few months later, on Mrs. Mattock's return from Saturday night shoppings, "Mother," said Jane, "I've seen Uncle Jim's ghost."

At this news Mrs. Mattock looked startled but incredulous ; and Jane continued.

“He come in, Mother, but he didn’t speak ; he went upstairs and I went after him ; then he shut the door. When he came down again he was wearing father’s best black that I’d heard him taking out of the cupboard drawers. Then he said, ‘When’s your mother coming back?’ And when I said, ‘Six o’clock,’ he said, ‘Then I’ll take the clock and go and meet her.’”

Mrs. Mattock’s eye travelled to the mantel-shelf : the clock was gone. She sat down, and beat her hands together for a minute or so. Then she went upstairs.

Late that night she went out into the garden, dug a hole and buried something. Jane was given strict injunctions to tell nobody that she had seen her uncle’s ghost.

A couple of weeks later the clock came back : but Uncle Jim never again.

Years afterwards Jane learned that her Uncle Jim had had the partial misfortune to kill his wife. She had not been kind to him, either in the care of his home, the spending of his wages, or the bearing of his children : the first she had impoverished, the second squandered, the last borne into the world without life. Jim had done his best to keep her from evil ways ; but when he retained his wages she took clothes, furniture, anything she could lay hands on, other people’s belongings as well. Against the sharp corner of one of the few pieces that remained, the much-provoked man had one day tumbled her with such effect that she never troubled him again. A judge and jury did their best to make him hang for it : but higher powers decided otherwise, and Uncle Jim got a commuted sentence of which he served less than a year—prisons being easier to break in those days than now. He was found, by the people who searched for him, dead from exposure and starvation in a respectable black suit, and by his side the stolen clock of which he had failed to dispose, its hands marking the hour of his ghostly departure from Mrs. Mattock’s door. Open fields not being the right place for a

body under life-sentence to lie in, they took him back to his prison and there buried him.

Jane's second love affair was at once more carnal and more spiritual, that is to say, more emotional. Coming to her through religion it found her flesh a more susceptible target, and its consequent impression upon the mind was less austere. Had she been destined for a series of religious loves Jane would doubtless have become a deteriorated character: but as measles and chicken-pox come but once to those of healthy stock, so for Jane this affair remained isolated.

It happened in her tenth year. At that time a beating of wings was heard in the chapel—this to speak figuratively—for a breath of revivalism had come to the locality in the person of a young missionary, to call back souls from languor and indifference to the paths of righteousness.

The chapel had never been so full before; and as Jane listened to his beautiful voice and watched his eloquent gestures, the flood-gates of grace were opened in her, and she became filled with a love of Christ which extended in even intenser form to the preacher himself.

Mrs. Mattock also, since her expectation of the "Second Coming" had staled through long waiting, was bitten with the desire for grace though in a milder degree—sufficient, however, to draw her, in her daughter's company, to other chapels in the surrounding villages while the missionary completed his tour of the locality.

Before this had quite run its course, Mutton-in-the-Marsh received a second visitation; and on this occasion, while waiting for the trap which was to convey him to the next meeting-place, he took tea in Mrs. Mattock's humble abode with the face of an angel and the appetite of a schoolboy. Jane toasted muffins for him in a fervour of devotion, and watched with delight while he ate nine well-buttered rounds, preferring them to her mother's seed-cake which was the alternative.

She had buttered them so liberally in the largeness of her heart that he had to use his handkerchief upon his fingers after eating them. As he did so she noticed his

thin white hands, wanted greatly to touch them, and regretted that she had not thought beforehand of providing him with dish-cloth or duster, so that thereafter it might remain a treasured possession.

He gave her, at parting, a coloured text which bore upon it the visualizing promise for those who are pure of heart. She pinned it up by her bed, and whenever afterwards her eye rested upon that scripture she saw—not God but him, very visibly and satisfactorily, sometimes preaching, but more often eating muffins and wiping his fingers with a handkerchief less white than they.

His final departure from the neighbourhood was followed by moods only gradually disposed of by health and those habits of activity which life required of her. She haunted the chapel by stealth, peopling it with the eyes, voice, gestures, and robust appetite of the being she adored, and sometimes repeating aloud his remembered words.

One day, sitting there in emptiness, she was found by her mother. It was then quite dark, and but for the disappearance of key, duster, and broom which Jane had taken as her excuse, Mrs. Mattock would never have opened the door to look for her. Coming in quest of these she heard sounds, and inside discovered her daughter, cold and rigid, but not in the attitude of prayer.

"Whatever are you doing here?" she cried, startled, while preparing to be angry.

"I'm waiting for the Lord," said Jane solemnly.

For a moment Mrs. Mattock was taken aback; but rallying to the defence of domestic discipline, the hour being late, "Well," she expostulated, "you needn't wait for Him here. Bed's your proper place; you be off to it!" 'Waiting' for Him indeed! Why can't you wait for Him at reasonable times? Who, d'you suppose, has been getting the supper while I've been away?"

"I didn't take no thought," said Jane. "Preacher said we wasn't to."

"You've gone silly over that preacher of yours," replied Mrs. Mattock. "Religion's all very well in its place; but you've got to have it with understanding, or where are

you ? And just you mind : you ain't one of the angels, and you ain't going to be. Your call's to be a woman, and you've got to behave as such ; so just you leave preaching to the men."

Evidently Mrs. Mattock had heard something.

"Why mayn't I be a man, Mother ?" inquired Jane.

"Because it wasn't God's will. There's men enough as 'tis for all the women as has to live and look after 'em. And if there were more women and fewer men, there'd be less trouble for many of us. For it's men as makes it ; that I do say, and always have."

These truths from her mother's lips fitted in sufficiently well with what Jane had already seen of the world ; and taking it that she had been made a woman so as to save trouble, she became resigned to her fate. Now also she better understood why boys are troublesome, and since they could not help it she pardoned them.

During this period of grace—which gave spiritual relish to her second love affair—Jane was more sensitive to those intimations of lurking evil which form so vivid a part in the life of imaginative childhood. At this time the unseen often terrified her ; but with a defiant will which opposed the running-away instinct she quickly got over it, and thenceforward could look not merely on death but life itself as a thing which fairly faced held no terrors. But that state of grace, so much more real than the preceding one, had little to do either with preacher or chapel. Individually achieved, it was not arrived at without a certain amount of adventure by the way.

One night, at her mother's bidding, Jane went to the out-house to fetch in some potatoes. Reaching to the shelf in the dark, she touched and overthrew, without knowing what it might be, an empty hamper. It fell upon her shoulders, handles down, and with a horrible suggestion of live paws slid down her back on to the floor. The feeling of life in the thing was, at the moment, so appallingly real, that—not trusting her sober senses—Jane leapt upon it, and trampled it too flat for any fear of its potency to remain.

She had to report the matter to her mother next day, and could not do it quite truthfully. "I trod upon it in the dark," was all the explanation she was able to give.

"Trod? You must have been an elephant!" cried Mrs. Mattock, whose sense of proportion was outraged by wreckage on so vast a scale.

"It was in the dark," Jane repeated; but Mrs. Mattock did not understand.

As time went on, she understood less and less the deeper import of her daughter's utterances; in consequence of which Jane's spirit came, at an earlier age than most, to take its airings alone. And though for some years yet to come the external bondage of home still lay about her, inwardly she began to go free, observing life in her own way without those limiting consultations of artificial experience which head so many of us off from wisdom. Thus Jane reached truth before she knew anything of the "facts of life"; and, for a consequence, took the makings of its law into her own hands as will presently be told.

At eight, two years before the mission had come to rouse her sexual emotions, she began reading the Bible on her own account, and theological questions grew apace. She had then no Uncle Jim to solve them. "Mother," she inquired one day, "don't angels never sit down?"

"Why ever not?"

"The Scriptures say 'they stand continually.'"

Mrs. Mattock threw up her hands. "You make me sorry as I ever taught you to read!" she cried exasperated.

The older Jane grew the more she tried the patience of the one parent Heaven had left her.

CHAPTER V

THINGS IN HEAVEN AND THINGS IN EARTH

BECAUSE of her reading propensities, from which she had so often to be routed, Jane was sent to read the Bible, on three afternoons a week, to an old blind basket-maker, named Bunny, living out toward Shadbury. His cottage lay back from the road about two miles from Mutton-in-the-Marsh, close to the large osier-beds which there congregated.

The Bible-reading was an arrangement made over Jane's head with Mrs. Mattock by one of the chapel elders, for the old man had been—and still was, with such spirit as remained to him—a member of the Brotherhood. Jane accepted the mission without feeling much “called” to it; but before long new ends shaped themselves, and her faculty for usefulness taking front place, the word of God lay shelved till such time as was left over from more absorbing occupations.

About this Jane said nothing at home; and pity remaining her excuse, she continued regular in her visitations, with good practical results. Day after day, with bare feet and girt raiment she went down to the beds and cut osiers, learned the rudiments of basket-making, the steeping, the peeling, and the sizing-up of the wands; came presently to know the trade names of all the weaves, shapes, and patterns, watching with absorbed interest the almost masonic structure of wicker crates and big washing-baskets, or the purposeful turnings-in of the rib-ends of lobster-pots; for Mr. Bunny's handicraft supplied a variety of local needs, one of which lay twelve miles away down-stream from Shadbury, at Yalemouth, the great fishing-port.

These articles of sturdier make were beyond Jane's handling ; but at the smaller and slighter kinds she soon acquired a proficiency, and as under the old man's tuition she trained her prentice hand, her wits grew nimble withal, and found in the quiescent attention of her solitary companion a new field for exercise. Always an eager talker, she had as yet seldom met with good listeners. A day came later when her words held the attention not of one only but of hundreds, sometimes even of thousands ; and it may have been from these early communications to a blind brain that she first acquired that faculty of visualization through the medium of words which ever marked her oratory. To this one hearer, at least, she gave new eyes to see the moving beauty of a world so visible to herself, and this not the less effectively when excitement imparted to her narrative a touch of caricature.

Telling one day of a horse encountered upon the road at sunset : " You saw the light come under his legs," she said, " and his shadow reached ever so. And just as he come by, off lep' one of his shoes and spun across the road like a rainbow ! You'd never think, without seeing it, how fire-like it all shone." She handed him the piece of worn metal as she spoke, so that he might feel its bright polish, and afterwards nailed it upon his door for luck. Of a certain small boy endowed with an abnormal appetite she remarked : " Some days he eats so much you'd think he must have hollow legs." Of a scolding woman running in pattens : " And tongue and feet she went clacking up the road like an old hen." The black mud which her wading feet brought up from the osier-beds she described as ' like drowned mole-skin,' and an evening mist pushing its way through a hedge by water-meadows was ' like a feather-bed with the stuffing coming out.'

The old man did not confess to the interest this form of conversation had for him ; but his silence, as with all good listeners, was of the inviting kind, and Jane's dramatic instinct developed apace ; she felt herself responded to as never before. It was her first real taste of an audience.

But though her visits to old Bunny were turned mostly

to secular ends, Bible-reading continued greatly to interest her. Everything she read she saw, and led by this imaginative sightseeing, had a great longing for spiritual things to come visibly home to her. She looked for angels among the boughs of trees, in the clouds of sunset, and in the dark corners of her bedroom at night, and often thought she saw them. Sometimes they took shapes her will could not control, and disappointed her by confusedly turning into monkeys, birds, cows, or other disassemblments of their bright origin ; but that, she understood, was their way of defeating the undue curiosity of an adulterous generation seeking signs, and she did not believe in them less because they played tricks on her.

With her outlook on life thus queerly compounded of reality and mysticism, she was ready to meet miracle at any time of day, at any corner of the road, and under any aspect in which it chose to present itself.

One evening as she was cutting osiers, she saw on the raised road-bank an undulating row of heads highly uplifted against a red sky-line. Presently as these grew in definition, they became of an amazing size and character : three camels, two elephants, a zebra, a large bovine creature with immense horns, of a kind unknown to her ; and behind, a long train of bright yellow caravans, as wonderful to her eyes as had they been arks of the covenant. A cavalcade of men and women mounted on horses and mules formed their travelling accompaniment.

Before this glorious sight Jane stood in petrified astonishment. This surely (for time and the historic past as yet meant nothing to her)—this must be the procession of the Kings of the East, returning from Bethlehem to their own land by another way. Here they came stepping alive from the picture pages of the Family Bible which sat in a mat of white crochet-work upon her mother's window-table. Lost in wonder she contemplated the passing array—the camels, with their proud necks, sour mouths, and slow traipsing gait, the elephants shrewd, nonchalant, and ponderous, the yellow vans, from the closed interiors of which came the strange scufflings and moanings of caged

animals. And the men and women, so different in type from any she had seen before—having amongst them a red man and two negroes—added to her excited sense that the ends of the world had suddenly come upon her.

When all had gone by and disappeared into the far distance she ran back, agog with the news, to visualize afresh to old Bunny the wonders she had seen.

He, indeed, had already heard tell of them as due to arrive in the locality. On the outskirts of Shadbury a big tent was being pitched to receive them; and there during the ensuing week they would be on show to the surrounding neighbourhood.

But in the event fate decided otherwise. That night the big tent caught fire, and amid the roarings and screamings of caged animals, the larger kinds broke from their pickets in wild stampede, and fled aimlessly across country for miles, irreclaimable under the darkness of night.

At early morning next day, Jane heard from her bed an unaccustomed stir and loud hullabalooings at the cross-roads, and looking forth was in time to see two camels, mother and daughter, entering under plain compulsion the vile confines of the parish pound. To so sordid an end had come, after the terrifying upheavals of the night, this thin remnant of the Procession of Kings! In that departure from circumstance only their cold facial expressions and innate disagreeableness of temper remained to indicate what glory had once been theirs. Turning with sour disdain from the low human herd which had roped them back to captivity, they began, where nothing better offered, to feed meditatively upon the loose rubble and moss-grown coping of their prison walls.

Jane dressed quickly, with a divided eye, and so soon as the capturing band had departed, ran forth in haste to repair their inhospitable omission. Robbing a neighbour's hay-stack as lavishly as she dared, she conveyed to the prisoners an armful of rescuing provender, having devoured which in three or four mouthfuls they showed their oriental gratitude by spitting at her. To that humble abode they brought neither frankincense nor myrrh as in days of old;

but when, on a later occasion, Jane's attention was for a moment diverted, the elder of the two ate the crown out of her hat, together with a few locks of hair, taken not in a clean bite but at a long standing pull, spitefully maintained against outcry.

It was the moral unkindness of the deed more than the damage and pain of it which brought tears to Jane's eyes, and caused her voice to break as she carried report to her mother of the misadventure. "But I don't want you to beat her for it!" she pleaded, seeing the parental eye wrathfully directed toward the pound.

"Beat *her*!" exclaimed Mrs. Mattock out of patience; "I'm much more of a mind to beat you. Whatever took you to go mixing yourself up with them unclean beasts? Why can't you keep off 'em?"

"They were hungry," apologized Jane.

"So'll you be, come dinner-time," retorted Mrs. Mattock, stern of mien. "And now you be expecting me to buy you a new hat, I suppose?"

Her right of grievance was undeniable; but the discipline had no effect. Jane's liking for unclean beasts, humans as well as quadrupeds, persisted obstinately through life; and mixing herself up with these she had often to eat less in consequence, remaining thin in all worldly things up to the day of her death.

Contact in this instance was soon over. Toward evening the camels departed, with the same haughty air of indifference which they had maintained throughout the day, under the stare of small rustics come to gaze upon the spectacle. Nobody regretted their departure so much as Jane. She watched them go sadly, filled with a sense of ineffectiveness at having failed either to secure their confidence or to understand their characters.

It was very seldom, however, that such division of feeling persisted in Jane's relations with the lower world. Ordinarily she attracted animals as beggars attract fleas; and local environment put advantages in her way which she was not slow to make use of.

The key of the parish pound hung in a place of conceal-

ment within the whitewashed porch of Mrs. Mattock's cottage. Those who had a right could thus obtain access to it at all hours for the internment or release of strayed live-stock.

Long before she understood its purpose, Jane had become accustomed to see at intervals the meek faces of penned beasts pressed against the high bars of the enclosure ; and because they lacked food would bring them tufts of grass, or sitting on the wall talk seriously to them of things which she thought might interest.

Into these slow minds she tried to instil an optimistic view of earth and the ways of Providence ; but friendship of so brief a character saddened her—all the more as she came to know how close was the connexion between Wednesday's cattle-market at Shadbury and the meat eaten on Sunday in her own home and the surrounding villages. That fact of life had to be concealed from the beasts whose confidence she sought ; and the deception she was obliged to practise gave a stab to her conscience. And so, on one occasion, being certain of the fate in store for a very engaging pair of calves, whose drover had basely deserted them for drink at the wayside inn, she applied a rash remedy,—purloined the key from its hiding-place, and under a favouring dusk gave them the freedom of the road once more.

They did not profit by it as they should have done. An hour later they were back again under escort, and Jane's share in the performance became revealed. She owned frankly what she had done, while concealing the life-saving motive which prompted her. "They were hungry," she said. "I had to let them out so as to feed them."

Her failure to preserve their lives gave vicarious importance for a short while to other animals ; and on the Sunday following she would eat no meat because of them, though mutton and not veal was the presented joint.

Mrs. Mattock, perceiving dimly, from questions oft-times repeated, that the pound had become a social portent to her daughter's mind, told her some lurid things about its past, calculated to show how much better the world now

was than in the preceding generation. For she could remember the time when not animals only but men stood there, earning by so many hours of detention "poor relief" under the old law for themselves and families. In that very compound she had seen her own father standing to enforced idleness with a group of others in the hungry and sullen days of the Napoleonic wars, when Britain, heedless of what senseless tyranny went on in her midst, was doing altruistic battle for the 'liberties of Europe'; and she described how often she had then brought to that passive bread-winner his midday meal in a blue porringer done up in a red handkerchief—exchanging it for the parish money, or for such portion of it as he thought fit to bestow on his waiting family at home.

Jane conceived the horror of that story more acutely than did the teller of it; but the many explanations she demanded were beyond Mrs. Mattock's power to provide. It was just the law, and the way that poor folk, when out of work, had been kept from starving, while England was making history and putting an heroic front on necessary but unpopular war.

In a hard lifetime Mrs. Mattock had acquired that habit of credulity which comes naturally to the uneducated poor, and sits on them so conveniently when the postponement of remedy is the main aim of the holders of power. Sequences she had an open mind for, but not consequences; and Jane's moral and intellectual up-bringing was curiously coloured by this maternal limitation. "Fill it quite up," directed Mrs. Mattock, when initiating her daughter into the mysteries of tea-making; "it always shakes down afterwards in the pot." And so the accommodating elasticity of water became fixed in Jane's childish mind for a fact; and sure enough, in the high-shouldered teapot it did seem to "shake down" after filling, even as her mother had said.

The people's tea, in those days, was compounded with home-made additions of chopped herbs, twigs, and bramble-leaves, which if they did not add stimulus at least gave strength and flavour, making the beverage not merely an

affair of coloured water. Once, at the house to which she carried weekly a basket of washed linen, Jane received a cup of kitchen tea, the taste of which stood out for years after as a landmark in things palatable. Not till she herself went into service, some years later, did she taste the like of it again.

The day on which Jane received this special reward for her weekly errand had turned wet and cold ; the load had been extra heavy, necessitating some pauses by the way, and she had arrived tired and a little chilled in consequence. The house, the only one in the near neighbourhood having pretensions to gentility, stood on the side of a hill, the lower slopes of which were covered by a thick belt of wood. Through this she came by a short cut to a back entrance in the private grounds, meeting nobody on the way except, at certain hours, farm-labourers returning from work.

On this occasion it was beginning to get dark when Jane set forth again ; and the housekeeper, seeing her to the door, inquired as a cheerful send-off whether she were not afraid to go back alone ?

Loneliness never having struck her as terrifying, Jane asked why.

“Through the wood, I mean,” the other explained, adding, to make objection more concrete, “There’s that old pit ; in the dark, you might fall into it.”

Since it lay well off the path, this did not seem probable ; but the point having been raised Jane now for the first time turned aside to look at it. It lay in a thick bush of brambles, perfunctorily guarded by an old wooden rail, too rotten to support any weight but its own ; and from its orifice came a dank earthy smell. Picking up a lump of shale, she made a cast—heard it bounding from side to side, but the end of its fall was unable to distinguish. This indication of depth being attractive to her sense of mystery, she threw a second and a third time, then, satisfied by the experiment, resumed her way.

Fifty years before, this pit had been sunk by a former owner of the estate, in the vague hope that mineral wealth lay below. Nothing had come of it ; and thereafter,

except as the record of an individual folly, it held no history. But a wood with an old pit in it will attract in legend that which it lacks in substance; and 'Dead Man's Hole' had become the popularly accepted name for a spot where up to date no tragedy had occurred, and no dead body ever been found.

The suggested danger did not diminish Jane's preference for the short cut, or cause additional qualms when closing day grew shadowy over her returns. On the contrary she found the wood a companionable place, responsive to mood, full of society in leaf and feather and fur; and for the sake of these she liked it better when humans did not intrude. There she met bats, and glow-worms, and owls—now and then was almost touched by the noiseless wing as she stood waiting on the sounds which solitude multiplied around her. Once she sighted a badger not knowing what it could be, and foxes and their cubs often.

One Saturday night brought encounter of a different kind: there, beside the path, very drunk and glorious, with feebly gesticulating hand, lay Caleb Gronning, the chapel elder on whose thumb she had taken her first bite into spiritual life. Beholding him thus brought low she stayed to proffer assistance. Her efforts to give him comfort proved unacceptable. Even the hat which she solicitously restored to his bald head he shook off again: the Lord's anointed, he told her, was not to be touched. Then, seeing that he had drawn an audience, and holy habit strong in him, he started to preach; and though as dishevelled in mind as in body the gift of tongues did not fail him. Jane heard herself exhorted to flee from fornication, and from strong drink, and from meats offered to idols, from back-biting and slander, and covetousness, and having done all these things well—to stand. On that last duty of uprightness the preacher laid all the emphasis that repetition can give; and with proof of his sobriety thus provided to any reasonable mind, he relapsed into inarticulate murmurings, when Jane, no longer directly addressed, felt free to resume her road.

Reckoning this a matter of personal privacy Jane said nothing about it at home, and the next day sat an in-

terested and curious listener while Caleb once again rehearsed the articles of his belief in the ears of an accustomed congregation. It was merely a repetition of things conventionally said many times before; but to Jane's ear, now newly attuned, the old stock phrases had acquired a livelier significance, the picture they presented was no longer general but particular; and when, as the bald head wagged and the long admonitory finger shook and pointed, she heard him petition for pilgrims in life's vale of misery a lantern to the feet, a light to the path, and footsteps which should not slide, there came vividly to her mind that queer derelict figure she had seen the evening before, blottesquely joined to mother earth amid a litter of dead leaves, still faithfully preaching in lowly abasement the word of God. Then her lips twitched, and she began to smile, and a naughty joy filled her heart; and looking upon the old man with eyes of understanding she liked him a deal better—and for quite other reasons—than she had ever been able to like him before.

For this was the book of human nature, the shadier side of whose pages she now turned under his unconscious guidance for the first time. It was the exercise of a new faculty through which, as through an open window, she found an expansive view awaiting her. Before long the comie wonder of it filled her with amaze and her heart chuckled like a brook.

As Jane, with growth of understanding, read deeper into those pages, chapel attendance became something of a strain and good behaviour difficult; for more and more as human nature revealed itself, unable to announce her discovery in words, she needed to laugh.

That, presently, is what she actually did. Laughter irrepressible though silent began filling her; and the chapel with its blank walls and its congregation seated so solemnly in rows became a place to bubble into as the incongruity of life and the humour of it took possession of her brain.

She who had hitherto looked upon human beings with a simple and direct gaze now began to see them round

corners ; and dimly the philosophical thought dawned into her mind—"If this is the way God sees things how He must laugh!" Before long she became convinced that it was indeed the only way in which He could see things and that a certain many-sidedness was the essential quality of the Divine outlook. And since, where she saw only round one corner He saw round all, the resultant fun He got out of it must be proportionately more.

When this conviction became fixed she had a great longing to communicate it to others : she wanted to get up before the congregation and say, "O Lord, teach us to see round corners!" But congregational speech not being allowed to her she could only laugh, when instances came to show how singularly blind to corners religion had made people. How had the whole world managed to become so blind, she asked herself ; or was it only a pretence ? She applied tests, and found, sure enough, that more often than not it was merely pretence, but that people did not know it. And so gradually the idea came to her that it was all a joke, the humour of which, overlaid by habitude, had become forgotten.

With this new attitude of mind vision took hold of her, and she began to see in concrete images the souls which before had so puzzled her. A curious likeness to animals crept in, and took possession of faces which had otherwise remained expressionless or without meaning ; out of these other meanings arose, her mind began to fill with parables, and characters to explain themselves. Outer light evoked inner ; with no expert knowledge to guide her, humanity grew map-like under the intense objectivity of her gaze. In later years Jane owned how much this spiritual Darwinism had led her to understand the origins and motives of the human species. "It was the animals," she said, "as first taught me the roundabouts of men ; and to be patient with 'em too. Walking on their hind legs tires most of 'em still. Performing animals—you do feel sorry for 'em."

So pictures came to her. She saw the chapel as a sort of village pound into which a herd of human live-stock had strayed seeking an owner and finding none. There she saw

them doing things they did not want to do, listening to things they did not want to hear, and yet, in some sort, liking both to do and to hear these things. Habit had hold of them ; they were a flock of sheep baaing in the wilderness they had made for themselves, and mainly because they would not see that life was really a joke, and God the maker of it. "O Lord, teach 'em to laugh!" prayed Jane, as she stood or knelt to worship in the midst of a congregation whose solemnity grew funnier and funnier. In her own person that prayer was answered abundantly ; time and again the spirit of the Lord took her and tore her as she became the vessel of His mirth.

It had its terrors for her, for she was not yet wholly brave : sometimes she challenged it, sometimes she prayed to be delivered from it : yet whenever it came about her with annunciating wings, she went forth resolutely to meet it, and her heart was filled with joy.

One day the congregation was singing a hymn : Jane also, till the words she heard coming from her own mouth smote her dumb. She looked around ; in familiar faces of men and women whose daily lives she knew, mouths opened and shut, napes of necks worked in collars, and bonnets bobbed ; a hearty appetite for song had hold of them all. If they rejoiced, why did they not laugh ?

The hymns of Primitive Brotherhood, though sung by both are written for one sex only, for in the sight of God the male stands representative, the greatest common denominator of the evil that is in us all.

"O miserable man I am !" sang the congregation in a mixed unison of treble and bass :

*O miserable man I am !
For when I look within,
I cannot count the full amount
And weight of all my sin.*

*O miserable man I am !
For when I walk abroad
On every side the pit lies wide
Which parts me from my Lord.*

Jane's heart began to go up to meet her own Lord in the air ; while down below the congregation continued to enjoy itself.

Their words became indistinguishable, the chapel walls melted away ; her soul was filled with exultation ; she soared, she sang inwardly, like a kettle beneath its lid ; she bubbled, she shook.

Suddenly she dropped back to earth horrified, aware that she had laughed aloud. Heads turned, half the congregation was looking at her—at others also, greatly at a loss to know whence so scandalous a sound could have proceeded. And still as they stared and stared they continued in cheerful song to bewail their most pitiable estate :

*O miserable man I am !
For while I dwell on earth,
By sin fast bound I miss the sound
Of Heaven's celestial mirth.*

Brought back to the common level, Jane had become solemn again ; inquisition passed her by, and still as the search went round voices were steady, while eyes meandered.

But though not exposed, Jane had not escaped individual detection. "What were you laughing in chapel for ?" demanded her mother sternly when they reached home.

"I didn't know I'd laughed," said Jane.

"Don't tell me ?"

"I mean, it just came. I was thinking of something else."

"You go on like that, I'll be ashamed to be seen with you," Mrs. Mattock complained. "Thinking of something else, indeed ! Why can't you think where you are ? If it ever happens again——" The consequences were left untold.

Jane hoped it would not happen, but it did. She had but to wait till the Sunday following to fall again.

It was during sermon time ; the season was summer, and the weather warm. Through an open window, beside where Jane sat, a robin looked in, sprightly and interro-

gatively alert. "What's in here? What is all this?" she heard him say. The voice of the preacher seemed to give him pause: he listened, but found no good in it. Out into the sunshine he went, but a moment later was back again.

"Man has become a vessel of wrath," sighed the preacher; "his will is to do evil; with his flesh he worketh abomination."

It was the same old story still: flick went the bird's tail; in dropping commentary nature found relief, and he was off.

Jane began to shake.

The vibration of the seat drew Mrs. Mattock's attention; she gave her daughter an admonitory nudge.

"Yes, Mother, I know!" pleaded Jane, anxious to be let alone. She screwed herself together, but the internal vibrations continued to betray themselves.

"Don't *do* that!" whispered her mother. "Be'ave yourself!" And a more viciously directed nudge emphasized the urgency of the demand.

Jane spoke from the depths of her shaken being. "I can't help it, Mother," she whispered. "It's from the Lord!" And under the gaze of startled wonder directed against her, the divine disturbance went on.

Leaving the ill to cure itself, the perplexed parent turned back to the preacher. The Lord's message gradually subsided, and Jane's little body became still.

"I don't know what's come to that child of mine," Mrs. Mattock confessed to a neighbour when recounting the incident. "If she *is* mine, that is to say."

By so unaccountable an outbreak in her progeny the basis of belief in herself was shaken.

CHAPTER VI

THE PROVOCATIVE SEX

EARLY in her career Jane shone at games. She played with energy, desperation, and good temper—of a kind. That which most tried her was her inability to clear the same jump as boys of her own standing. Every one of them could beat her by a notch ; and mainly it was the flick of her skirts that did it. Her long hair was also an affliction, tumbling into her eyes at unexpected moments ; what was worse, boys took advantage of it in games of catch, seizing hold of it as she ran.

The injustice of this one-sided handicap inflamed her temper. Skirts were bad enough, but in the catching of these she had to acquiesce ; catching by the hair, on the other hand, she regarded as a personal indignity, and smote without mercy the faces of the boys who did it. For this, in the beginning, she was regarded as a spoil-sport ; but after a stand-up fight or two, which she rather enjoyed—making nimble but somewhat unconventional play against the superior strength of her antagonist—that preliminary claim of woman's right was conceded to her : having paid the price for it she won. Nevertheless her discovered touchiness on this point brought on her, from latent admirers, a more engulfing capture round waist and neck than was accorded to others.

Tom Deakin was one who at an early date developed this practice. "Have I got you now ?" he inquired joyously on one occasion, having her completely in his grasp. "No, you haven't !" she retorted, and by a trick of instinctive jiu-jitsu (before training in that art had caught hold of Western civilization) slipped from his embrace. He held

her all the faster next time ; and it became an unspoken contest between them—on his part to impose capture that could not be questioned, on hers, by desperate contortions, to elude her brawnier adversary.

But though personally she fought him with spit-fire tenacity, she backed him against other boys. “Tom can beat the whole lot of you !” she protested, when punier combatants got the crow over her ; and generally it was true.

Many were the ways they provoked her into assault ; nor were Jane’s own ways blameless. As she shot up in strength of body and bone, she constituted herself the champion of smaller children, making it law that, when she was by, no chivvying or persecution of them should pass unpunished. Then boys for the fun of it, possessed of a sure means to rouse her, would go in batches, three or four at a time, select victims, and fall on them. And Jane would fly furiously from one to another with indiscriminate poundings, or a box on the ear sharply delivered at the full fling of her arm.

With many of these offenders she could have fought singly and won, for not only was she lithe, strong, and courageous above the average, but driven into real battle would abide by no rules of the ring such as boys adopt in foolish limitation of their powers. So long, however, as she did not strike at faces with closed fist, no real fights ensued from these physical chastisements directed to moral ends. The fact that they bore it in good part only drove her to wilder expenditures of energy, and though the disciplining of the male by corporal affliction remained unattained, she did not cease to make it her goal.

But presently there came a change. At the age of twelve certain of the bigger lads in the village began to persecute her with attentions she did not like, and to lie in wait for her when household errands took her by solitary ways. Sometimes this incalculable conduct frightened her, at others it only made her angry ; yet when a certain degree of this kind of attention was publicly paid to her she did not dislike it. Then she would run after the boys,

giving them hearty slaps which, though painful, they seemed rather to relish. It began then to be borne in on her that boys liked girls to hit them, or at least liked some girls to do it; and she, apparently, was one of the favoured ones.

Nevertheless, at solitary meetings these slappings stood against her as things to be avenged by retaliatory measures which she would have gone far to avoid; and when perchance she espied ahead some waiting adversary, she would creep home by back ways of hedge and ditch, often quite roundabout, but would not explain to her mother when questioned why sometimes her errands took so long.

As she grew older the number and ardour of her pursuers increased, and more than most Tom Deakin was a persistent one, perhaps because circumstances gave him more opportunity than others. For about this time—that is to say when Jane was nearly fourteen, and he her senior by three years—Tom became apprentice to Mr. Bunting, the smith, who at her father's death had taken over the business of the forge. Their regular meetings were at the midday meal, which by arrangement master and apprentice took under Mrs. Mattock's roof. Soiled from labour they would come in at call to sit down at the widow's table, and Jane's duty was to wait on them.

Tom Deakin, with the bloom of manhood beginning on him, was big and muscular for his age; and secretly, though with some scorn intermixed (for his intellectual parts were small) Jane admired him. All through her life 'proper' men and good fighters attracted her fancy, and she objected less to their weak-mouthed habit of swearing than to their alternative spittings, which she could not abide. In her mother's house she cured both Tom and his master (however badly they broke loose again elsewhere) by dogging their ways with a floor-cloth; she also got them to wash their hands, and in other ways, bringing quiet tyranny to bear, exercised a civilizing influence over them, which though unappreciated grew gradually into habit.

Tom, after a while, becoming profitable to his employer,

began to receive a small wage : out of which, after paying for his keep at home, he had a bit left over for himself. Thus provided with worldly means, he occasionally bought "goodies" and offered them to Jane ; and there was no question that Jane liked eating them. Then one day Tom presumed on the friendliness of her regards and went too far ; catching her alone out blackberrying he held her in his arms, breathed into her face, and kissed her a good many times very much against her will.

For that she slapped him with an angry vehemence which to Tom, who had only kissed her, seemed viciously provocative ; and when, hot of blood, he pursued her as she broke away, the epithets he threw after her were not of an endearing kind. Then anger spurred Jane to attempt the impossible : jumping a boggy stream she landed short, and fell back souse into the middle of it.

Her complete drenching secured for her the immunity she sought. Tom, standing sheepish upon the bank, watched her get out, independent of mien, her back turned resolutely towards him, and without further attempt at molestation left her to return home alone.

Dry bread and sugarless tea were her reward for wet and soiled raiment ; and still she did not tell of him. Open and truthful in matters where she herself was to blame, she was secretive as regards others ; and about such episodes as these would have lied rather than let her mother know of them.

The next day Tom brought her a packet of sweets ; she took and ate them as a debt well owing for the loss of her spilled blackberries, neither thanking him nor offering him a share. During the whole of the ensuing week she remained haughty to all his blandishments, and in Tom's hearing received indifferently and without remark her mother's reproof for the ungraciousness of her bearing towards him.

This prolongation of her resentment roused in Tom two things—temper and appetite ; and to his continued pursuit of her there came no check from interposing authority. Jane's attitude remained unreasonable but staunch ; in spite of her wrath she would not tell, and Tom was free

to go the way of his choosing without others hearing of it. It was their own affair, his and hers ; and so reckoning his eye grew hot on her.

This singling of two from the common herd by a selective process wherein repulsion and attraction each play their complementary part, is but the preliminary to nature's immemorial game. There is nothing very moral about it, —why should there be?—when, by all the instincts, not the social order comes then to be consulted but individual consciousness—a thing which has its human basis in atavisms stored up through countless ages before ever society began.

Tom in his seventeenth, Jane in her fourteenth year, though infants in the eyes of the law, and babes by the eyes which education had given them, had a grown-up side which in this connexion parvenu society too little regards. In their fresh young bodies a hoary antiquity revived its buried fires, and in a demure English village, glossed over by a negligent smudge of civilization, the old fight was to be fought out once more, without any noticeable improvement of results, albeit with a difference, as will presently be told.

Twice in the week, driving in a borrowed donkey-cart, Mrs. Mattock went into Shadbury to do errands for her neighbours. On one of these, the day when the washing hung out to dry, Jane worked in the afternoons alone. Thus selecting his time Tom found opportunity for renewed contact.

The washhouse was the scene of their meeting. Jane busy at work, he entered unobserved : his touch was upon her before she knew. The rank maleness of his advances troubled and confused her senses ; though in spirit she despised him, her body had become intensely aware of him.

“I wish you'd leave me alone,” she said, looking away from him.

“I am leaving you alone,” said Tom ; he stood clear of her but remained close.

Jane wrung out a cotton frock, and placed it upon a pile

with other garments—an augmentation due to the mishap which had befallen her in the previous week.

Tom attempted a joke. "I wish it was me you was washing with them nice hands of yours."

Jane scorned him : she hitched off from him defensively so that the stooled washing-pan stood between.

"That was your doing !" She indicated the wrung-out frock. "If you hadn't come pestering——" She left it at that.

"There's some get pestered over nothing," said Tom. "Am I pestering you now ?"

"Yes, you are ; you know it."

"Well, then it can't be helped." So saying he sat down.

"Oh, can't it ?" Jane went over to the door, threw it wide. "You just walk yourself out."

Tom took his opportunity as he found it, there was no one to see. He was not particular what he did.

Blood of two kinds was then hot, before he could guard himself Jane's bucket of cold rinsings was over him. "Paid you back !" she cried, and stood her ground, bucket in hand.

For that, later in the day, when her back was turned, he let down her clothes-line—lay in wait for her to find it, and across hedge gave her a grimly contented look which said plain as words, "I'll teach you, my girl, to play equals with me !"

He watched as she gathered up the soiled linen, satisfied at having given her a stark lesson. She burned under his eye, but said nothing. A spiritual wrath, no longer of battle, surged in her blood ; all thought of contest or retaliation in physical kind was over, she had done with him ; the stark lesson was learned, but applied differently. In this shift from mere physical affront to back-handed spitefulness she saw him not as a master but as a base thing, fit only to be spurned. And because she had really liked him the thing struck her a blow.

She went into the house, shut and locked the door. Even over this, his last stroke of malice, the instinct for concealment remained, and she set her energies to removing every trace of damage before her mother's return.

The fire under the washhouse copper was out, so filling a large pot with water she set it to boil on the kitchen grate, and meanwhile started with local rubbings and rinsings to remove the slighter stains.

The actual damage done she found to be trifling ; but as she rinsed at specks which now and again stood obstinate, her indignation grew. She trembled, her hands became weak ; she toiled furiously and would not spare herself.

Presently the pot, full up to its lid, began to spurtle and boil over. Responding to the call, Jane started to lift it aside ; but she miscalculated her strength ; the bulky vessel toppled sideways, and in a smother of steam and ashes out streamed its contents over grate and hearth, some over Jane also.

When Mrs. Mattock returned from her marketings she found care awaiting her ; with one hand and both feet badly scalded Jane was forced to admit a chapter of accidents. "The things on the clothes-line came down," she said. "I was starting to wash 'em again, and I upset the kettle."

In spite of these happenings she had done her job ; all blemishes were removed, and the linen was back on the line. But the damage to herself was not so easily repaired : her right foot was so painful that, though swathed in wet rag, she could hardly put it to ground.

Mrs. Mattock applied homely remedies, with only a modicum of scolding ; and for the rest of that week and part of the next Jane went about her work with one hand bandaged and useless, and on painfully limping feet. Over their many wrappings she wore an old pair of carpet-slippers which had once been her father's, and thus accoutred was quite an object of interest to neighbours, who came in to look at her and exclaim.

"It's a merey," said one of them, "that you didn't scald yourself all over. I knew a child of two as did that and died of it, and just by the same way—upsetting a kettle on herself." By this cheery comparison Jane was taught how much she had to be thankful for.

Mrs. Mattock had the pleasure of repeating the story of

the mishap many times during the week, and each time with a fresh expression of wonder at "however Jane come to be so silly."

Next day at dinner-time, Mr. Bunting came to hear tell of it; Tom Deakin also. They both expressed a proper concern and the usual amount of wonder how any one so sensible as Jane could have come to do it. The smith said that for scalds white of duck's egg was a better remedy than hen's, water being more natural to it. Tom had no such practical suggestion to offer, but in his rough way showed kindness and compunction. On coming to work the next morning he brought with him a duck's egg so that the better remedy might be tried; and for a further demonstration, remained after work hours to dig Mrs. Mattock's potato-patch. That job done, he came into the house to receive commendation, but Jane's hard eye refused to favour him. Upon his entry she hobbled away upstairs, and remained there till he departed. But though her attitude was unconciliatory, on one point she gave him entire satisfaction: she continued not to tell of him. This was ground, perhaps, for thinking that he had discovered the right way to handle her.

The problem she presented him was merely of a generic kind: all women he had been taught to regard as very much alike so far as the main business of life was concerned; and the stories in that relation, which had been told him by older youths or men, came with undeviating precision to the same comfortable ending, reassuring to the man's standpoint. Nor had he any reason to regard Jane as different from the rest, though to his proprietary eye she had choicer qualities than most and made a better show of them. Lately his approval of her had become moral as well as physical; she was a good wench as well as an attractive one, seeing that she had not told on him. Nevertheless, like all the rest of her kind she needed to be taught; and Tom, a healthy young animal well on for his years, was quite ready to do the teaching.

So on Sunday, well washed, and with hair properly plastered, he went to chapel quite as much a Primitive

Brother as any of them. Mrs. Mattock was there alone; and during prayer and sermon and hymn-singing his thoughts, healthy and abounding in naturalness, were mostly of Jane. He sang "O miserable man I am!" with great heartiness along with the rest. Singing is a good spur not only to the emotions but to the appetites; and when service was over Tom's Sunday appetite had quite an edge on it.

CHAPTER VII

THE UNEXPLAINED HAPPENS

It was the time of year when in country districts evening chapel service changes to afternoon. Mrs. Mattock had gone out to visit a sick neighbour some distance away, and Jane in her disablement was keeping house alone. Seeking amusement and occupation in her loneliness she had started a stew of vegetables for the evening meal; the pot simmered on the hob, and a kettle, freshly filled for tea-making, was over the fire.

The sounds of chapel worship had begun twenty minutes or more, when the latch of the door clicked and in came Tom.

"Hallo, Jenny," he said in propitiatory tone, and doubtful of his welcome stood at awkward pause regarding her.

With a stiff twist of the head Jane looked at him, and then away again.

"Why haven't you gone to chapel?" she demanded.

"I come up too late."

"You can go in now."

"Not worth it: come to see you instead."

To that Jane said nothing; she supposed, now, that she must hear what he had to say.

Tommy, in order to be on good terms again was quite willing to humble himself, if mere words would suffice.

"Jenny," he said, "I'm sorry. See! Don't be hard on a chap."

She attended with set face; she had not forgiven him yet, she was not even sure that she meant to forgive him.

"I didn't want to see you," she said. "You might just as well not have come."

Tom's powers of conversation were limited : she did not help him, and he wished to be at ease with her. He moved up to the fire where Jane was standing. "What are you cooking there?" he inquired, took off the lid and hung an investigation nose. "Onions? I'm fond o' onions," he said.

She snatched the lid out of his hand and put it on again. "You'd better clear out," she said. But even as she spoke thus sharply, she was acutely aware of a danger lying ahead. If he forbore her anger sufficiently long, she might become more soft to him than she wished; though he had behaved abominably it was her weakness to be drawn by him. Moreover he was, by comparison, behaving quite properly now.

Tom seemed to be aware of his power. He sidled up to her.

"Jenny, there's something I've brought for you. Would you like to see it?"

She would, and would not. But the foolishness of his advances had a sort of attraction for her scorn. This shaped her answer.

"I don't want it," she said. "What is it?"

He went across to the sofa, an extension of black horse-hair much worn and sunk in the middle; over the back and seat lay a large patchwork coverlet, and at one end a hair bolster. Underneath this he thrust his hand. "There!" he said artfully. "You can go and look for it yourself."

"You can take it away!" she told him; but curiosity itched and was strong.

"It's there," he said, making as if to go; "and if you leave it, your mother'll find it, that's all."

Thus challenged, Jane, anxious to see what she was rejecting, went across to the place of its concealment, with full intention to throw it out of doors, and bid him go after it. Stooping, she ran her undamaged hand under the sofa-cushion, searching for the spurned offering. This was the opportunity Tom sought. The next moment she found herself in his arms.

At once all the fire of her antagonism revived. Twisting

vainly to free herself, she struck back at him with all the force at her command. "Let me go!" she cried. "If you don't let me alone I'll kill you!"

Tom answered with thick laughter; he cared nothing now for threat or blow. "I've got you! I'll teach you!" he cried. Putting forth his strength he threw her down upon the couch; the patchwork coverlet slipped from its back and fell over her. Enveloped in its folds, pinioned, hardly able to move, she struggled still. Without cry, her breath came and went in a suffocation of rage, the desperation of her will gave her strength.

Presently as the struggle went on he began cursing her. Affection, liking, had ceased to exist: it was all animal now.

Through the fireplace wall from the chapel came the sound of praise; familiarity gave distinctness to the words:

*Jerusalem, my happy home,
Name ever dear to me,
When shall my labours have an end,
Thy joys when shall I see?*

The voices of men and women mingled in unison gave forth with good appetite the well-flavoured combination of words and tune.

"Let me go, Tommy; let me go!" gasped Jane, fright taking the place of anger. "Oh, Tommy, don't, don't, don't!" Her voice rose to a wail: but still from the chapel, louder and more important, came the praise of Heaven:

*When shall these eyes thy heaven-built walls
And pearly gates behold,
Thy bulwarks with salvation strong,
And streets of shining gold?*

Other verses followed sung with great heartiness and fervour. Suddenly from the hob sprang a loud spluttering, and the hiss of steam. The lid of the kettle wobbled convulsively.

"Oh, Tommy!" cried Jane, "the kettle's boiling over!"

Great is the strength of prosaic things which stand established in custom. The kettle continued to make an important thing of itself: it was urgent and would brook no delay, it threatened, if not attended to, the domestic catastrophe of an extinguished fire. Like a kicking cart-horse in the shoeing-shed—not to be stopped while its four legs are down—there was no way of appeasement but one. Tom, recognizing the kettle's claim as the call of a superior power, conceded the emergency of the case: and Jane, once more a free agent, flew to the rescue.

The interruption though momentary seemed to snap their relations: immeasurably separated, they stood apart strangers. In the face of that intangible barrier Tom felt stupid; it then struck him that, for the time being at any rate, further conversation was needless. There was indeed nothing to say. Jane was making strange sounds—only little sounds, but he did not like them; having no meaning they provoked him. She stood with her back to him, trying to be still. Now and again her head gave a quick shake and her shoulders heaved painfully. "Oh dear!" she kept whispering to herself, "Oh dear!" He had an inclination to kick her, that at least would make her turn round and acknowledge him. She seemed somehow to be shutting him out, as though he did not exist: she, after all that he had taught her!

A dull scuffling of feet sounding through the wall told that service had ended: people were beginning to come out. A while longer he stood watching her, then without another word opened the door and went.

For a long time after he had gone Jane stood looking at the window: against the lowered blind she saw in the evening sunlight the shadow of the potted geraniums, and amid their motionless leaves the three pin-pricked words "God is love," which she had imprinted upon it when a child.

With this text staring her in the face she tried soberly to correct and delete from her heart the hot anger which burned there toward one of God's creatures with whom till now she had been friends. It was no easy matter, but she did her best conscientiously to stand right in the eyes of her

Maker, and forgive Tom his trespasses towards her. She said the Lord's Prayer, and felt better after it. Then hearing her mother's step coming up the garden she hastily rearranged the coverlet across the sofa back and began laying the table for tea.

On Mrs. Mattock's entry Jane inquired after Mrs. Deakin, the neighbour whom she had been seeing, and heard that she was now better and sitting up again. "I met Tom, as I come along," said Mrs. Mattock, "with the others, coming from chapel. He said he'd just been in to see you."

"Yes, he did come in," said Jane. It was the only word about his visit that passed between them. Later, when her mother had gone upstairs to take her things off, Jane remembered to look under the sofa cushion. Nothing was there: careful search brought conviction that nothing ever had been there. It was a trick, then, merely a part of the wanton treatment to which she had been subjected, a sublimated form of mockery for making her feel small.

In Jane's mind this only remained: Tom had been very rude to her—wicked, she even thought. He had done his best by obscene behaviour to make her hate him; and supposing that he had so intended, her sense of dignity and self-respect were greatly hurt; she could not think of it without crying. But she had not a notion that it meant anything, or that it had any sober relation to the ordinary facts of life: it stood too much outside her mental vocabulary to be thought of as explainable. Of one thing she was resolved; she would never, if she could help it, speak to Tom again—never except as a duty in the presence of others. The idea of telling her mother about it never entered her head: had she the will, she had not the words for it. Her maiden mind had been trained by a scrupulous inhibition of habit and custom against any such power of self-expression as that.

So in the days that followed, saving for the necessary intercourse of the midday meal, she kept silent and held her head high when she and Tom passed each other. He was out of her life entirely, their friendship was over.

Other lads, envious of him in the past, did not fail to see

that Tom Deakin was now in her bad books. Tom took the chaff indifferently, as one who, knowing a bit, had but to bide his time. For a while he eyed Jane awkwardly, a little abashed by the high sternness of her demeanour ; but the comfortable fact that even now she had not told of him, strengthened him in the belief that her hostility was but a passing caprice, a demonstration satisfying to female vanity but not intended to be permanent. So presently, as they encountered, his look became more directed, carrying with it a note of self-complacence and understanding, enough to let her know, so soon as she cared to, that his mind was still favourably inclined towards her.

Ignoring these indications, Jane kept herself in fast custody and took great pains to avoid all chance of his being rude to her again. But it was difficult always to guard against chance meetings, and more difficult still to prevent herself being followed when the direction in which her errands took her was known.

With this handicap to his favour, Tom was able now and again to ensure meetings under circumstances which better suited his purpose than hers. Coming upon her one day as she went bearing the week's washing to its destination, he proposed carrying her basket for her—insisted against all protest, and having thus forced her to accept his company, made offers of reconciliation which she must needs listen to.

But the roots of Jane's power of resistance were no longer the same as formerly : the unexplainable had had its effect, and the quarry had become tame. Reference to the grievance she had against him showed a weakened defence ; her voice faltered, changing from reproach to appeal ; what she most needed was reassurance. Tom promised he would never be rude to her again : and was.

Jane was very much upset by this : it made her cry. Nor did she then altogether reject the comfort he offered her. On this occasion he was much more kind, said that he did not want her to cry ; and again owned how sorry he was for what he had done.

After that he was sorry on two other occasions ; and then sorrow and interest seemed to diminish for a while, and she

saw little of him except at their regular times of meeting.

But though respite recurred for longer or shorter periods, there was no certainty in the matter. On days when she least expected it, he would again cross her path, or his eye would be on her, bidding her follow him. A curious fatalism took possession of her, she ceased to resist ; something had happened to a corner of her life that she did not understand ; it was out of her own keeping, and another had unexplainably taken hold of it.

While this oppression was on her she did not even seek to avoid encounters which she had reason to think might be awaiting her. Seeing Tom's footprint before her in paths leading to solitude did not make her turn back ; even though humiliation and the paralysis of her own will awaited her, she would still advance to meet it with resignation and the faint hope for once to be spared.

Meanwhile, they met daily in the presence of others, and there came gradually to be no outward and curiously little mental difference in their relations. For Jane, at all events, the obsession to which she succumbed at intervals was a thing apart. In life, as she saw it around her, it was something unknown, unplaced ; the world had for it no acknowledgment : and having thus no relation in her experience, neither had it a meaning.

The circumstances which induced this mood having continued for the better part of a year, her attendant state of mind had almost become a habit—reason did not enter into it ; nor when she attended chapel or said her prayers did it arouse any special consciousness of guilt, except in so far as secrecy had imposed a non-social element in her life.

That being so she was the more unprepared for the sharp change of mood which one day, almost like a stroke, took hold of her. Like all which had gone before, it seemed unexplainable, a thing not to be reasoned about.

That day, while in the company of others, Tom's eye had given her a signal. Consciously avoiding it, she was next conscious of avoiding him also ; and was then quite

definitely aware that the instinct by which she fled from him was one of repulsion.

This lasted for three days ; hide and seek went on, while Jane, with wary strategy, kept out of the way. On the Saturday afternoon, however, luck failed her. At midday she had heard Tom announce that he was going to accompany his mother into Shadbury to do shoppings ; and so, freed from all apprehension she set out on her weekly errand by the accustomed way.

On her disencumbered return, she saw, as she entered the wood by the stepping-stones of a small stream, an attendant figure standing in the far distance, too familiar for her eye to be mistaken. His back was toward her ; it was still early ; evidently he was expecting her to arrive the other way.

What then happened was curious : Jane's way of retreat still lay open ; but she did not choose it. A mere postponement of the evil did not seem a remedy worth having. Not fear now, but fierce antagonism had got possession of her. Retracing her steps to the brook which she had just crossed, she sat down on the bank and drew off one shoe and one stocking. Having put on the shoe again she filled the foot of the stocking with a well-sized selection of stones, knotted them firmly down at the ankle, so as to hold them tight, and thus armed proceeded upon her way.

As his quarry approached Tom turned about from the tree-trunk against which he had been leaning and came leisurely towards her. He grinned, appreciative of the subtle manœuvre which had brought them together.

"So you thought I couldn't catch you, did you ? " he remarked pleasantly.

Jane looked at him stiff. "Tom, you let me alone !" she said.

The foolishness of this belated proposition left him almost stупent. "Hallo, what's up now ? " he inquired.

Jane did not explain ; giving no ground, she repeated her demand.

Tom chuckled a little maliciously. "So I've got to let you alone, have I ? " he queried, coming closer the while.

“Keep off!” cried Jane, and drew back a step.

“What?”

Spying rebellion in her attitude, Tom came at her with a rush.

Up with her weapon quick, she swung at him and missed.

Tom roared amazed. “So that’s the game is it, my wench?” He closed in on her.

She slipped under his arm, turned desperate, and struck with all her force.

Tom stumbled, and made a deep grab at her, and the frenzy of her blows went on. Her brain span away and away from her; she beat blindly, fury triumphing over reason. She had no fear of him now, none.

Having done her utmost she stopped. At her feet Tom lay like a log, without stir or sound. From his left temple oozed a dark patch of blood. In a huge slow bubble it welled out, across his face, filled his eyes, wiped out his features, dripped, staining the earth.

All this Jane, in her exaltation, saw only in a disembodied way, a symbol rather than a fact. Deliverance had come: she had triumphed gloriously. Scarcely knowing what she did, conscious only of that one thing, she leaped, she danced, her blood sang; she rejoiced, feeling herself alive.

Suddenly as it had come, the elation went. She halted dead. From airy rushings the world came back to her a solid thing with attendant circumstances of time and place: trees, a path, sunlight, four o’clock in the afternoon, and birds singing overhead. At her feet something lying unnecessarily still—for an unnecessary time, that is to say.

“Tom!” she called; and again: “Tom!” There was no answer.

There never was any answer. Without in the least intending it she had kept her promise made to him less than a year ago. That stark fact, as she proceeded from unhelpful words to helpful deeds, she came presently to realize.

This of course took time; not till she had carried water

from the stream, and applied moppings and bandagings to the blood which ceased to flow, not till she had touched with fearful certainty the stopped beating of that lusty young heart, and felt under her hands the growing chill of the body that had been rude to her, not till then did she perceive in all its formidable shape the situation in which she had landed herself. Here, in the fifteenth year of her age, by a little over-directed energy for a right cause, she had killed her man as thoroughly and justifiably as any soldier in battle for the things which he is told should be dearer to him than life. And when the joy of battle was out of her, she was as sorry about it as any decent person is bound to be. Murder, at its best, may be a human, but it is not a humane, remedy ; and all Jane's instincts hitherto had been upon the humane side of things. It was a strange irony of circumstance which had brought her down with so resounding a thud upon the opposite scale.

Tom as he lay dead, now that she had washed the blood from his face, was a very presentable young man, broad-chested, muscular, like and fit to have become a useful member of the community : the light down upon his lip was attractive to her woman's sense, and she remembered times when she had liked him well enough. Putting the question to herself in cool blood, she did not know why she had killed him. Yet though the remedy now seemed overreached, the impulse which had carried her to it had been irresistible ; the pity was that its strength had not been scientifically calculated to fit the need.

Only once, after finding him to be really dead, did she directly address him. " I'm sorry Tom," she said, hoping that his somewhere hovering spirit might hear and understand. Then, as her mind cleared to the actual situation, she became practical.

If he was found she would have to tell about him, about herself also : she would have to try to explain something that was unexplainable : it could not be done. The mere killing of him—the accident—was a thing she could easily confess ; over that she had no qualms—only a very genuine regret. But why she had done so—no, a thousand times

no ! It could not be told. And as that was not to be thought of, a way out must be found.

In the next twenty minutes, 'Dead Man's Hole' for the first time in its existence had received substantial justification for its name. Tired out from that energetic christening—totally immersive in its character—and from all the activities and emotions which had gone before, Jane crept slowly home. It was already dusk when she entered.

"You're late," said her mother.

"Yes, I was kept," said Jane. "You needn't trouble about them missing things ; they've been found."

Avoiding further talk, she hung her hat upon a peg, and went out into the shed to wash her hands. There was also a ragged stocking to be done away with, but for that she had to go upstairs and change.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LOST AND THE FOUND

TOM's unexplained absence from work the following week caused comment at the midday meal. His master, who all the morning had been busily one-handed with extra calls, was inclined to think ill of him and to withdraw all previous recommendations of one hitherto accounted a good worker. Nor had Mrs. Mattock any favourable opinion of a young man absent not only from work on Monday but from chapel all Sunday as well. Jane alone was disinclined to blame him. He had mentioned Shadbury.

"Perhaps he's gone to stay with his uncle," she hazarded.

Her mother looked at her with surprise. "What foolishness you talk," she said. "Why, his uncle's been dead this six months!"

"So he has," said Jane. She helped herself to potato, and accepted with resignation the rejection of her plea in Tom's favour.

Later, when further inquiries were made, it stood against him that he had announced so definitely his intention to accompany his mother into town.

"He never told *me* he was coming," the forlorn woman declared tearfully. "And he always such a good lad, and so steady," she went on, "and bringing his money home regular every Saturday night. But this week I haven't seen a penny of it!"

The general opinion was that Tom had gone off on the loose; and when the time of his continued absence became so long extended as to make that explanation insufficient, the alternative that he had gone away to better himself—tired of the poverty-stricken home where his father's death

had left him increasingly responsible for the needs of a large and growing family—was accepted without much difficulty. It accounted for his mother not having heard from him. “I didn’t think Tom would ever be so selfish,” commented Mrs. Mattock when that solution was put to her; and Jane in her heart felt a pang. Though she herself might have a right to say certain things concerning him, she was sorry to hear him ill-spoken of by others.

More than a month went by, and Tom’s continued absence with all its possible causes became throughout the locality an accepted topic rather for surmise than for wonder. Discussion, when it recurred, ranged equally over many vague possibilities—none of a lurid or tragic kind—and as no definite conclusion to the matter was ever reached, it came in the end to die a more natural death than had been meted out to the unfortunate subject of its concern. Tom’s disappearance became a trivial incident, and his name a memory.

Meanwhile, in spite of an occasional feeling of remorse, which drew her heart to forgiveness though not to tenderness, Jane was curiously happy. Emancipation had come to her: life was no longer haunted by apprehension, mind and body were at unity again, and physically she was in extremely good health. In a certain way, indeed, her state of robustness puzzled her, and one day in all innocence and frankness she made a remark about herself to her mother which made that good woman sit up.

It was as though she had suddenly and most unexpectedly been met by a ghost. Fixing upon her daughter a haggard and apprehensive stare, she asked a question or two. The answers gave confirmation to her worst fears. She beat her hands down into her lap, as her manner was when much moved, and sat looking into the fire for a long time without speaking.

“I never thought to live to see this,” she said at last.

“See what?” inquired Jane, nonplussed.

“You a disgrace to your ’ome, and your poor dead father.”

Jane did not in the least understand, and sought enlightenment.

"Is it nothing as you've been telling me?" demanded her mother indignantly. "Who the man is, I want to know."

"I didn't say nothing about a man," said Jane, gazing at her in wonder.

"No, you didn't; but babies don't come all by themselves, so far as I know; and as how you're on your way to having one, you needn't make any mistake."

By this answer Jane was given better ground for an understanding of the matter than had ever come to her before. Ideas flashed and were gone again.

"Do you mean Tom?" she demanded half aghast, with a dim dawning sense of long-awaited revelation. "Was it Tom you meant, Mother?"

Mrs. Mattock, always rather lack-lustre on an emergency, knew that by rights it was her parental duty to be angry; instead, she began crying. Mopping her eyes with her apron, she sat envisaging the present evil in conjunction with a superstitious contemplation of the past. For a while she seemed almost not to have heard. Then—"Aye, like enough 'twas Tom," she said. "You ought to know."

Reading by signs in the face before her, she found suspicion confirmed. "So it was him, was it?" she inquired almost furtively, as though on that point some scruple of secrecy might still hold.

With tightened lips and eyes grown large, Jane stood looking at her mother as over a gulf too wide to cross. Trying to take in the meaning of it, her thoughts alternately halted and rushed.

"What d'you look at me like that for?" cried the aggrieved woman, in impatient complaint. "Why ever can't you speak?"

Jane tried to: once she failed. "I didn't know," she mumbled at last.

"Didn't know? What didn't you know?"

"I didn't understand. Ought I to have understood, Mother?"

"Understand what?" Jane's mental processes were beyond Mrs. Mattock altogether.

“What he done.”

The mother made a forlorn gesture of despair over the unreasonable state of her daughter's mind.

“Anybody with sense would have understood; but you never had any! When did it happen?”

Jane recounted, with place and a date now too remote, how the shock of circumstance had befallen her.

“D’you mean to tell me that was the only time?” The inquiry came sharp.

She shook her head. “It was, at first; then”—her voice trembled—“then there didn’t seem no end to it.”

Mrs. Mattock’s face hardened. What for a moment had seemed merely a monstrous mischance, almost forgivable however much to be concealed, had now assumed an uglier and more vicious character: such a thing in repetition could only mean depravity. Haling the culprit before no living tribunal, “Oh dear!” she moaned, “what would your poor father say? It’s well for him he’s in his grave, and it’s only my ’eart you’ve broke.”

“I haven’t broken your heart, Mother, have I?” supplicated Jane.

Mrs. Mattock avoided direct answer; with such mentality as she possessed she was busy fending herself from the slur cast on her parental responsibility. With haggard eyes she turned on her daughter almost fiercely.

“You knew; you must have known!” she cried.

“How could I know,” pleaded Jane. “You ’adn’t never told me.”

Mrs. Mattock cast about for escape with harried glance. “It’s not the sort of thing one does tell,” she retorted. “Decent behaved folk don’t need to be told a thing of that sort.”

“Don’t they?”

Jane waited: just so far as her thoughts had now carried her she wanted badly to be told something. Silence continued a while: at last it came out.

“Married people don’t have babies that way, do they, Mother? Not like that.”

"'Ow else?" demanded Mrs. Mattock, stern on that unedifying singleness of Nature's way, in her daughter's case so abhorrent to her.

"I'd 'a thought they'd have been ashamed of themselves," postulated Jane.

Into that Mrs. Mattock was not prepared to enter. Her apprehensions were now taking a wider range; life's problem thus disgracefully hurled at her, could not be confined within those four walls. "I wonder what'll all the neighbours say!" she lamented. "Oh, we can't never let *them* know." She paused, with sharpened look, saying suddenly, "So that was why Tom run off, was it? The dirty dog!"

"He didn't know," explained Jane; "not——." Sequence broke. "I 'adn't told him," she said.

Mrs. Mattock's mind continued to stray out toward her world and its opinion. "And Mrs. Deakin too," she went on; "Tom's going has made a difference to her; and she'll put all the blame for it on me."

"How can she," persisted Jane, "when he didn't know?" Unmerited reflections cast on Tom continued to pain her.

"You'll have to go away," said her mother, "that's all. It's hard on me, just as you was becoming useful, and my health not what it ought to be. But you never thought of that."

"Why must I go away?" quavered the girl, greatly shocked at this new outcome of her misfortune.

On that point Mrs. Mattock could have no sparing word. "Because you've disgraced yourself, and me, and everybody. D'you think they'd let us stay here, chapel-charing, with a bad mark like that against us? And you there, and the child and all! It wouldn't look right."

These were new views, confounding to Jane's moral sense: she was helpless to argue against them.

Mrs. Mattock continued weakly to search her way through the difficulties surrounding her. "Of course, if we could find out where Tom was . . ." She stopped discouraged. "Like enough he wouldn't marry you even then. We've got no proof to show."

"I wouldn't have him," said Jane stoutly.

"Why not?"

"Not after how he behaved to me."

"Don't you talk of 'behave,'" retorted Mrs. Mattock with finality, more sure of her ground on this point than on any other. "When people behave as you've done, getting babies without husbands, there's no choice left for 'em. They've got to cover what comes the best they can."

But Jane was no longer heeding her, with another rush her thoughts had gone ahead; there, gathered suspendingly like the over-hovering wings of a dove, they centred to a new light which now inwardly shone on her. Faced by that vision, drawing the breath of its stupendous mystery, all teaching of second comings, of indwelling grace, of regeneration, atonement, redemption, paled to insignificance beside it. She stood uplifted and transfigured, trying to take it in; and at last she spoke.

"Are you *sure*, Mother?"

"Sure of what?"

"Will I have a real little live baby, Mother?—all of my own?"

"You've made pretty sure of that," said Mrs. Mattock, casting a censorious eye. "It won't be any one else's so far as I can see."

Jane waited till the sense of it had come fully home to her. It was then that she directed against the much-injured parental bosom her worst and deepest stab of all.

"Oh, Mother, I'm glad," she cried, "I'm glad!"

Whereat Mrs. Mattock threw up her hands in despair. "Well, you are a punishment!" she exclaimed. For what, she did not say.

Left to her own reflections, Jane had thoughts of a transcendent character. On the main point her mother's instruction had been clear and precise; she knew now what was the matter with her, and truly it was marvellous in her eyes. Looking back in later years from fuller experience upon that moment of her life, she never failed to find virtue and reward in all it did for her; and if the reasoned form of

her meditations, as here indicated, came later, their colour and brightness were with her even in those earliest days, and the joy and gladness she gathered after had their upspringing force in the apocalyptic moment when the meaning of her shameful condition was brought home to her.

Without knowing and without meaning it, she had become a mother; and, with a jump of instinct across all social inhibitions and scruples, she reckoned it was what she was made for. Equally without knowing or meaning, she had fought, when need was, to preserve for her coming child the maternal chastity she owed to it, and in the process had killed the poor blundering fool who had attempted that greater violation of a sanctity which is Nature's own.

And this poor fool was father to the life which fed upon the beatings of her heart! But though, as with wisdom, she had done mere justice to herself and him, it had been by an impulse wherein reason held no place. And now, curiously enough, her killing of him raised him in her estimation. Mysterious forces had been behind her act, driving her darkly forward to do their will. Might not similar force have impelled him also? Like the kettle which had boiled over without power to contain itself, so he, with fatherhood in him, had blunderingly reached for that kind of immortality which alone lies within mortal power to effect; and like the female spider when she has eaten her mate, Jane now bore for him that after which he had unconsciously sought, in safer keeping than his own.

These are not a child's thoughts, nor did Jane have them then or their like till long afterwards; yet that which was to produce them had already come about, making a startling change in her outlook on life. The world she had hitherto stood in was shocked from under her feet; and as she saw it removed, the men and the women who peopled it become little and foolish—things which had in them neither virtue nor understanding. Characters diminished, dwindled, phantasmagorically evaporated and vanished away; and a fluidity of impression very strange, too reasonable and intuitive to be regarded as hallucination, characterized her waking hours; for Man in the making

retells the story of creation in every mother's breast as time brings to the birth.

Thus strangely conducted, Jane passed through those first days of fuller knowledge. She went into the chapel ; and as she looked at the empty rows of seats, her old sense of laughter revived with added force. It looked such a silly place now, a place deliberately planned to make fools of people—to which end in its emptiness even now it seemed to stand waiting. There she had heard men chatter about God ; and here under her heart was God's first message, direct and unequivocal, to herself alone. What had they taught her so that her understanding might be open to that angelic announcement, and her spirit ready to make the best of it ?

She saw the congregation seated in their accustomed places, the foolish and the wise, the impious and the devout, all in their lives more or less known to her ; and the only character which did not diminish, change, and grow foolish was that of the man she had killed. Something genuine was there, something that, in its own way, had been real. The sharp anguish of flesh to flesh as she remembered it, with its accompaniment of degradation and wild fear, that at least was a real experience ; it had made her, now she understood it, not less but more. And so it was that to her uncompromising partner she now turned eyes which had, with understanding, a new element of respect. Henceforth she could acquit him of a mere rudeness and folly without meaning or excuse ; she had learned now that his bestial breach of good manners had a purpose in it after all. Two battles they had fought together : in the first she had been beaten, thereafter yielding servile submission to his will ; in the second she had won and had become herself again. Thus they stood quits. And because of that understanding her soul triumphed, and her heart was glad in its possession.

That night alone in her own room, bearing without resentment the dismissing gaze of her mother's reproachful eyes, " God bless poor Tom ! " she prayed ; and wept for the once warm body quick with a will of its own, which her too rough handling had turned to clay.

CHAPTER IX

LEADING-STRINGS

It was a lamentable fact, indigenous perhaps in any community where the shades of Puritanism prevail, that Mrs. Mattock had no friend or neighbour to whom she could confide her trouble. In such a matter as this there was no safety from tongues; the most scrupulously instilled whisper would become a shout. Unaided and unadvised she must go furtively her own way, trusting nobody.

A week after Jane's revelation she disappeared from view, summons to a sick relative being her excuse, and was absent for three days. When she came back her face-saving mission was accomplished, and her imaginary relative well on the road to recovery.

In that interval, with an uncommunicative silence as of the grave, Jane's destiny had been decided for her. Mrs. Mattock, as she imparted the news, evidently expected her own thankfulness to be shared. "I've found a place where they'll take you," she said; "the only one I could find. Lucky I happened to know of it."

"Where's that?" inquired Jane.

At Ossalbury, she was told, a place forty miles distant in the opposite direction from Yalemouth. Everything was arranged and fixed, even to the day of departure. Neighbours were then to learn that Mrs. Mattock was sending her daughter into service—to "a kind of school-place kep' by ladies"; this vague description covering the awful fact that Jane was booked to an institution set up for the reformatory training of young girls who had gone astray.

"They say as they'll be kind to you," appended Mrs.

Mattock, solicitous of a more cheerful acceptance for the news than Jane's face offered. But she spoke with constraint, having upon her conscience that which she must presently reveal.

"It's a big place," she went on, "and there's a lot of girls there—fifty, I shouldn't wonder: some of 'em too small, you'd think, to know anything;—but there!" She flapped her hands in deprecation of a world such as it was.

Jane still made no remark; and Mrs. Mattock, restless under that fixed gaze to find excuse for what she had done, continued to explain matters.

"Most of 'em do laundry-work, all kinds of sewing too; and they gets trained for service. It's the cleanest place that ever I saw, just the home to suit one like you."

"'Tain't my 'ome," said Jane. "When'll I come back, Mother?"

Mrs. Mattock was evasive. "You'll 'ave to stay long enough to say you've been in service, anyway," she replied, "else folk here would wonder."

Jane's mind had now begun to apprehend something, which in spite of previous hints it had not realized. Attaching to her return was a condition her mother forbore to name.

"I'll be gone a long time, then," said Jane in dull tone.

As the ensuing silence became uncomfortable, Mrs. Mattock, seeking a diversion from what was in both their thoughts, took the plunge she had dreaded.

"There's one thing you've got to mind. They're all Papists. 'Twasn't my choice: there was no help for it."

Jane was receiving so much enlightenment on the subject of self-possession that her next question was scarcely to be wondered at.

"Am I to be a Papist too?"

"No," said Mrs. Mattock, "they won't force you: they promised me that; but you'll have to take care about it."

"I suppose," she continued on charitable reflection, "I suppose they can't help 'emselves, being born to it; it's a kind o' habit. But you needn't believe all the things they tell you. Say your prayers, and remember you've been

taught to believe in God and not in graven images ; then no harm won't happen to you. That's how I look at it."

By this exordium Mrs. Mattock relieved her conscience, so far as she could, over the course to which necessity had compelled her. To these emissaries of the Scarlet Woman she had confided her daughter's soul, with permission duly accorded that they might seek by suasion to join her to themselves and to idols ; a portent worth noting from days when Romanism presented a blacker face to the nonconformist conscience than it does now. Salving her conscience with memories of Jane's exceeding obstinacy over spiritual guidance in the past, she hoped for the best. The harlotry of Rome was less horrific to her eyes than the scandal and social disgrace which stood alternative. What Jane's 'poor father,' the so recently invoked, would have said about it she forgot to ask herself.

A week later Jane quitted her natal roof, accompanied by a wooden box with rounded lid and a covering paper of trellised rosebuds. This, her only wardrobe from quite early days, contained all her possessions—clothes, a few books, a coloured text, some uncut pieces of madapollam, on the speculative shaping of which into small garments her fingers were to be hopefully employed during the ensuing months—and a large framed sampler.

This work of art, commenced in her fifth and finished in her tenth year, compendiously revealed the individual direction of Jane's spiritual and mental growth. Starting in the unskilled years with rectangular arabesques of no significance or beauty, it had developed into an architectural arrangement of some pretensions—an imagist setting forth of her home surroundings. The chapel front and porch were almost recognizable, helped perhaps by a large tablet bearing upon it the words "Primitive Brotherhood," and a date. Around and beneath this stood trees and flowers, such, maybe, as grow in Paradise, but are not to be found on earth. They had their roots in air at various elevations, and about them were birds of an almost equal size also supported on air, without flight to aid them. The omission of the graveyard from this pictorial rendering of the home

she loved had been repaired by insertion in the ground-space on which the chapel stood of the following words, Jane's own composing :

*Death is a dreadful thought,
And every person ought
To think of it with reverence
Before they go for ever hence.*

These lines finely wrought, and a zigzag border surrounding the whole, completed the main composition, which might after its kind be considered a very fine one. Into the few gaps which remained, scriptural texts had been inserted, exigencies of space compelling brevity in the selection. "God is love" came first ; "Watch and pray," "Jesus wept," and "Remember Lot's Wife," were the others—a choice not so arbitrary as might seem ; even in that last was to be found a certain symbolism. Jane had always remembered Lot's wife more than most things ; that figure of salt made changeless and immovable by the act of turning to look back on the seat of its affections, was one which had ever deeply impressed her. Once, in years gone, she had questioned her Uncle Jim about it ; and he too had recognized its beauty, saying it would be a fine clean sort of death for some men's wives to die. In the event he and his own had to put up with a less tidy alternative.

Jane, however, continued to cherish the vision, perhaps to guard her own conduct thereby under like circumstances ; for when mounted into the cart which was to bear her from home she did not once turn to look back on the things she was leaving. Mrs. Mattock, standing at the gate to see her go, noted the omission, and wondered at the exceeding hardness of her daughter's heart.

Jane travelled to her destination partly by carrier partly by coach. Under the ruins of an ancient abbey she was absorbed by a large conventual building surrounded with high walls, through which, by an orderly process of unlocked doors, she passed to an interior remarkable for its gaunt cleanliness, the height of its windows, and the wooden placidity of its occupants.

In a manner, the kindness promised awaited her ; but she was aware that something in the nature of a prison now enclosed her, and for the queer incongruous reason that, having life, she was about to have it more abundantly.

From the first moment of her reception, she felt the impulse of spiritual forces. The Sister who led her in bowed before an image which stood at the end of a passage illumined by small tapers. Quite pretty, Jane thought it. She noted also that the Sister's feet made no sound ; only a rumble of heavy draperies accompanied her, as she moved swiftly along, her arms folded away in the ample sleeves of her robe—like the angels, thought Jane, susceptible to the note of fulfilment and irresistible obedience which this attitude conveyed. The Mother Superior gave her a greeting so beautiful that her soul thrilled to it, and almost became Catholic on the spot, like the Apostle Paul. "God bless you, my child ;" the words, gravely uttered, carried weight with them : nothing like that had ever been said to her before at first meeting. The matter-of-fact questions that followed she answered cheerfully ; nor was anything said to cause shame or embarrassment. She was told of duties, hours, and rules to which she must conform. Chapel services were mentioned : these she must attend. "You pray ?" inquired the Mother Superior.

"Yes, ma'am, nicely thank you," replied Jane, instinctively defending that ground which she had a right to.

The Mother looked at her with surprised attention, but made no comment. "Come with me," she said, and led the way into the Chapel.

There Jane beheld an interior of a kind wholly new to her. The mysterious orderliness of its arrangements greatly pleased her ; nor was she shocked by the crude colours and the bad art of the images, having seen no better : the pair of china dogs upon her mother's mantelpiece, which had hitherto been her highest standard of ornament, were greatly inferior to these.

The Mother Superior instructed her in the meaning of the objects standing around. To a figure of Our Lady, as important and monumental as Lot's Wife, her attention

was specially invited ; before it burned quite a number of tiny candles, which guttered badly in the process. These she was told she could earn by good-conduct marks, with the added felicity of setting them alight at the feet of the smiling image ; and the merit of this automatic act of prayer was duly explained to her. Though coming to her with a foreign accent these things made a kindly impression ; the picture-book side of religion had always attracted her, and here she found it frankly admitted to the ritual of worship. It was her first light on a quest even then begun for a Church where all the world might bring its toys and play with them.

The Mother Superior seeing that she was impressed made haste to improve the occasion. Left in solitude to be called for (but not until her conductress had herself for a few moments joined in the exercise) Jane knelt devoutly for a short half-hour before the image in pale blue spangled with stars ; and the time did not seem long to her. The figure, she noticed, was standing on an upturned sickle. "I wonder that don't cut her feet," she thought. The next notion which struck that interrogating mind was, "I wonder whether she's holler ?" The china dogs were ; you discovered it by turning them upside-down, and Jane with her passion for cleanliness had a delight in washing their white insides for them. Interiors had always fascinated her ; she wanted to know about them, how they came, what they were doing all by themselves with nobody looking on. Out of this inversion of a material world spiritual thoughts came to her. So now.

Gazing upon that mild radiance, she passed from the material to the spiritual lying behind ; objective questions ceased presently to trouble her ; drawn into wonderland, released from immediate care, letting light and colour take the part of reason in her brain, she became independent of time and place, and her mind soared.

Then a Sister came and called her to tea.

From that moment she became part of a machine, wherein the pattern of life was methodically impressed

on fifty human beings various in character, but all alike in the accidental circumstance which had there brought them to bed and board.

Intimacy, privacy, solitude were rigidly denied them. They knew each other by their Christian names, any further communication under that head being forbidden. They prayed, ate, slept, washed, worked, and took exercise under a watchfulness that never faltered, and a rule which never lost its temper or varied from a set course wherein harshness and indulgence alike had no place. With strange eyes they looked at each other, sharing in common an experience of which nothing was said. Mutely they formed friendships, antipathies, understandings, and found by subterfuge a way into each other's confidences, codes and written scraps serving as go-betweens. While accepting submissively for the most part the rule laid on them, there were individual outbreaks. When these happened the offender disappeared for a time from the general gaze, to return in a while, with no marks of ill-treatment, submissive like the rest.

Jane herself never underwent that discipline; her experimental soul accepted with a lively interest this investment of its spiritual independence, and five months of routine passed more lightly over her than most. She was then shifted to a separate roof where deeper experience awaited her; and saw then, with a more keenly arrested eye, young mothers with their children: whereat, as at sight of a rainbow, her heart leapt.

Yet even in that brief sojourn, while she waited for the event in which she personally was concerned, changes and disappearances occurred. The weaned child did not linger in this place of its nativity; nor did the nursing mother, when once that stage of her duties had been fulfilled, remain a member of the institution. Some of these, as Jane knew, went out to service, some back to their own homes.

In the chapel stood the Madonna, clothed in the colours of heaven and studded with stars, holding her child in her arms, not to be parted. But in the institution over which she presided the matter was generally arranged differently,

and the example she so beautifully set became subject to a time-limit beyond which it would be better not to inquire.

Jane made the mistake of doing so ; but was not informed till it came to her own turn. It was then she discovered for certain that the statue was "holler," like the china dogs at home.

CHAPTER X

FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

THE announcement was made to her while she still lay weak and embedded in the maternity ward of St. Mary of the Foundlings. The Mother Superior herself communicated the proposal ; Mrs. Mattock was there also, to give the necessary endorsement.

Against doctor's orders, Jane sat up suddenly in her bed, clutching the life which, in the face of that threat, seemed so terribly her own. Her large and haggard look struck poor-spirited Mrs. Mattock like a blow.

"Why can't I have him at home?" she demanded fiercely.

Mrs. Mattock could not face the attack ; she slewed her head, and spoke out of window, watching the sparrows on the roof opposite. But what she had to say, she said.

"'Ow can yer speak of it? We've always been respectable : I 'ave at least. If people was to know of it, I should 'ave to give up as I told you."

"We could go somewhere else," argued Jane.

"No we couldn't ; not at my time of life, and with my 'ealth what it is. We can't afford for it to be known ; you should have thought of that before."

Never in her life did Jane waste words on a cause that was lost. She knew her mother, she knew truth when she heard it, and she saw that the fates were against her ; flesh and spirit might strive, but could not achieve the worldly means to make things otherwise. She let herself down in the bed, covered her face with the sheet and spoke no more. And all her joy and pride in the man-child to which she had so stalwartly given birth died the death.

The Reverend Mother took up the tale and spoke, very sensibly and kindly, things which Jane did not hear. Afterwards, indeed, she came to realize them herself as being, in a way, true ; for if motherhood must be murdered for social ends, the rest follows easily enough. To one in Jane's case no practical alternative was given ; productive of life at sixteen, aspersed and unbefriended, she had no hope to find, without aid, a decent sustenance for family life. That which offered in its place was, from the material standpoint, abundantly the best. Upon the spiritual side, also, she had no present conviction of the superiority of Primitive Brotherhood over Roman Catholicism that she should make any special effort to secure for her son a sectarian patrimony so precariously come by. Primitive Brotherhood had set up no bright and shining example of itself either in Tom's soul or in her own. Why, then, should she seek to pass it on to another generation ?

When mother and daughter were left to themselves before parting, Mrs. Mattock tried consolation of another kind. "He's a pretty one !" she remarked softly, looking down at the snuggled head of the grandson she would not own. "What are you going to call him ?"

And Jane, meek and without resentment for the thing over and done, said, but with no joy in her tone, "I'm going to call him after Uncle Jim."

Mrs. Mattock let go a remonstrant breath. "Oh, but you mustn't do that !" she exclaimed. "P'raps you didn't know, as I never told yer ; your Uncle Jim killed his wife."

Mild-eyed, in a faint wonder, Jane took to her bosom that family skeleton, and cherishing it said, "Did he ? Well, it's in the family, so there's no help for it : I shall call him Jim. He and I was fond of each other."

Feeling she had done enough for one day, Mrs. Mattock said no more ; but when the time came for parting, compunction moved her. "You've took it wonderfully well, Jane," she said, "I thought you'd make trouble, which was why I come."

"Seems I've been trouble enough to you already,"

replied Jane in resigned tone, letting herself be kissed, and there stronger than the pride that lay dead was the pride that would not plead.

But in the night, after mother-service had been rendered, and the satisfied babe had dropped to sleep at her breast, then all the woe of it come back to her, in a great wave of misery and shame. She put the child away from her, and turning on the pillow lay face downward, stifling her sobs lest others should hear. And what cut deepest then, and left its rough mark for the years afterwards, was not the breach in the home-relations, nor the moral transgression, nor even the deep loss which her maternal affection must undergo; but the very shame of it that having born life it was out of her power to provide for it. For that, and for that alone, she smote her culprit breast; and like enough, had she thought of it before, no Jim would have been born, and no Jane lived for this tale to be told of her.

That ease of out-bursting grief was not allowed to her for long. The night-sister came to inquire what was the matter, and finding the state she was in, spoke as one with authority—of duty, and of a child's welfare depending on its mother's health, and of other things with eternal names, the merely temporary significance of which had been now revealed to her.

A week later when Jane and Our Lady met again in the chapel it was as strangers. The china dogs of home were now more life-like in their appeal, having less pretence about them to things which they did not perform. She continued to make polite curtsies, as she had been taught to do, in that and in other directions: but though she had been given ten good-conduct marks for her disciplined deportment whilst bringing a large child to birth in her sixteenth year, she refused to burn candles on the proceeds, applying them, instead, to the mundane alternative of jam for tea, not for her single self, but for the four other occupants of the maternity ward in which her days were now spent.

Thus had the early hopes of the Community, as regards herself, failed of fulfilment; and recognition of that fact

may have led to a quicker parting between mother and child than need otherwise have come about. Had she accepted the faith, place and work might possibly have been found for her in the Orphans' Home where little Jim was presently to be made secure of spiritual inheritance. But if that particular temptation was set before her, it did not attract.

In all outward conformity Jane performed her duties, industrial and spiritual, for another year; but to the doctrinal teaching lavished upon her in class and discourse her mind remained impenetrable; the evangelical kink was already strong in her character, and institutional Christianity, which failed to fulfil itself in terms of life, ceased to have meaning.

The day after her child had passed from her care to the separate nursery branch of that hard model establishment, Jane quitted its walls, walking out with a resolute effrontery against which no adequate provision had been made. Before the scandalized portress could carry word of that unauthorized exit made under her very eye and in the face of loud protest, Jane had disappeared; and in spite of energetic skurryings and inquiries down back street and by-lane, was not so to be traced.

An agitated search along canal-banks and round ponds which then followed was equally fruitless of result; and only three days later did it become known, when her box was called for, that Jane had taken service in the household of a family grocer, named Marbury, from which with the connivance of her new master she obstinately refused to be moved.

This assertion of her independence had come about through happy chance. In the processional walks allowed, once weekly, to the inmates of the establishment she had seen, while passing, a notice pinned up in the window of a shop whose sober architectural dignity had previously attracted her.

That window—one of a pair with small panes substantially framed in a broadly flowing curve too shallow to be called a bay—is still to be seen at Ossalbury, typical of a commercial beauty for which modern enterprise has no

use. Considering that she sufficiently satisfied the domestic requirements set forth in the notice, Jane applied for the place. Her frank confession that she had walked out in search of independence did her no harm. The fact that she hailed from the Institution told something about her character; but the failing was a common one, and Mr. Marbury, with a pious zeal not unmixed with rancour against Rome, was minded to take her so soon as he learned that she was no Papist. Coming thus unaccredited, and with so obvious a past, she offered advantages which as a man of business he realized. She was already tall, and though thin, looked healthy and strong, qualities not to be despised when they are to be had without bargaining on one's own terms.

Other things beyond his discernment lay out of reckoning, his regard being only for things immediate and outward. It was ten o'clock in the morning, customers waited their turn; and in that tall slip of a girl, bright of look and quick of tongue, he saw not the angelic power essaying with wings full of eyes its first flight in a direction all its own.

So, through the slot-like entrance of a shop door, between windows barricaded with a sample miscellany of goods, Jane passed, hopeful and elated, on her way to liberty. It needed some spiritual finding, for materially the prospect was obscure.

The life here opened was typical of much that is held to be strong in the British character. Its comfort, regularity, and limitations were as impregnably fixed as though the eternal laws of gravity lay at their base. In this establishment God, as sleeping partner, was consulted with formal deference, but not in any spirit of abject submission or humility. Family prayers, at the day's two ends, clinched with Heaven the bargain for all the good earthly things which circumstance had brought about: 'prayer made unto Him continually' stood for a guarantee that business should not diminish nor profits fail.

Here Jane learned the sacredness of the things of home when they have attained a comfortable scale, and beheld with some astonishment how much food a prosperous middle-

class family could eat, how much firing they consumed, how many blankets they slept under, how few ideas entered their brains, and how little they cared about anything that went on outside their own lives.

Jane did not herself share all these benefits and immunities. Her meals were handed to her on a plate; she had to her bed blankets which had worn thin, but no sheets; and, so long as it was needed for household use, the comfort of the kitchen fire remained to her. In each case, however, she had quite as much as she had been accustomed to, but worked harder for it.

Her main lesson was that, though living under the same roof, she did not belong to the family. Even as she ate and slept apart, so also she knelt and prayed apart; and the prayers she heard were adapted to the circumstances not of herself but of her employers.

She was expected, nevertheless, to attend the same place of worship—the more by reason of the taint of Papistry which lay over her past; so if in conformity there be any spirit of brotherhood, the communal bond was not wholly lacking.

Her first sight of the family was in the parlour behind the shop, whither on arrival Mr. Marbury conducted her. They were a ferret-eyed breed, but plump, not thin, and tending through carrot to sandiness. The carrot was on the father's side, the sand on the mother's; it included her complexion and was for expanse as the sands of the seashore.

Mrs. Marbury, a monstrously fat woman, with the air of one who moved seldom, sat to receive her amid a litter of domestic industry. At a certain stage of her investigations into Jane's character she sent the smaller members of the family out of the room; thus supplying them with the more exciting pastime of listening at the door.

This edict did not include a heavy-browed youth with bulging eyes who sat reading rather short-sightedly in a corner, paying no outward attention to what went on—until his father, repairing the omission, bade him go and mind the shop. Then sighing heavily, he shut his book and departed.

This break in the proceedings had followed upon mention of the institution from which Jane came.

"You've had a baby, I suppose?" inquired the fat woman in soft woolly tones.

"Yes, ma'am," said Jane.

"Is it alive?"

"Oh yes, quite alive, ma'am."

"Is the father not going to marry you?"

"No, ma'am."

"Why not?"

"He's dead."

"Did he die before the child was born?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You ought to have been more careful."

Thus they sampled Jane and her history.

A sudden slap and a resounding squeal outside the door followed by a rapid departure of feet, bore witness to wider interest in Jane's career than that of her prospective employers. Mrs. Marbury remained quite undisturbed.

"Well, you'll have to be respectable here," she remarked in a lenient tone; and from these words Jane learned that the place was to be hers.

Having nowhere else to go she was allowed to start work the same day, and to pick up from her predecessor the details of her employment. With wages at three pounds a year and all found, there was little she had not to do. Mrs. Marbury took charge of the cooking, the girls made their own beds. Jane did everything else. Life became strenuous for her.

But it was not uninteresting. For the first time she was in a household of children. It was an object-lesson of much that proverbial philosophy does not teach. The age of innocence is the Devil's playground; children, the fruit of the womb, are the most effective missiles to his hand for hurling against the meek upon earth; and their function being to epitomize the sins of society, your social reformer can have no better training than to become menial to their will.

The little Marburys were admirable disciplinarians for one

whom it had pleased God to call to an inferior and subordinate station. They lied, fought, and stole, and whenever possible they put their thievings upon her ; if they carried her dinner-plate down to the kitchen they took pickings by the way ; like the camels they occasionally spat at her, and like Tom, whenever she offended them, harassed her in her work. It was so beautifully easy to kick downstairs, by the merest accident, a pail of dirty water, or drown the soap in it when her back was turned, or push a pot on to the fire so that it boiled over, or make tracks across a newly washed floor in muddy shoes. After such doings they would shamelessly demand her services in extra ways, or without a quiver of compunction call her to join in family worship ; and Matilda, the eldest of the three girls, strategically placed for the purpose, would stick out her tongue at her while saying the Lord's Prayer.

She had a long tongue and was proud of it. By tucking her chin firmly into her throat she could reach out and touch the top button of her frock. "Can you do that?" she would ask. She regarded it as a real accomplishment.

In spite of their bad behaviour, it seemed as if they liked her. Now and again, when out of favour with others, they sought her company, and breathed confidences into her ear.

"I hate Wally ; don't you?" the injured Matilda inquired one day. "Have you heard the noise he makes when he is eating?"

Wally was the brother ; he was now almost a man, and, very much his mother's favourite, was accorded a man's privileges.

Wally was not likeable to any taste that Jane could conceive possible. Nevertheless she did not hate him ; like all the rest of the world he interested her. His mind, like his eyes, was of a bulging character, encountering everything with a curious abruptness as though the short-sightedness which afflicted him belonged also to his brain. He would approach a door as if about to walk into it, opening it only by an afterthought. It was the same with

his conversation ; and his every action partook of a like character. He attended on his father in the shop, but his wish was for the ministry. His mother worshipped him with blind eyes of adoration and unfair appropriations of his sisters' portions in pieces of cake and the brown skin of rice puddings. It was for this last reason that Matilda hated him.

For some days after her arrival he ignored Jane entirely. Then, walking in stockinged feet, he brought her his boots to be dried.

Coming close, he halted and looked at her, his underlip a little pushed out ; under his sandy hair he had a round pasty face about which hung a heavy sort of intelligence.

"What's for dinner ? " he asked. Jane told him.

"Oh ! Are you a Papist ? "

"No. I belong to the Primitive."

"What's that ? "

"I don't quite know," said Jane, doubtful of his point.

"It's the chapel where I was brought up."

"Oh ! " He paused, looking at her the while. "Have you been born again ? "

"Yes."

"How long ago ? "

"It was done when I was seven."

"D'you believe in Hell ? "

"When I don't think about it."

"What ? "

Jane amended her statement. "I haven't thought enough to say."

"You've got to believe without thinking," remarked the heavy youth solemnly.

"Yes, I suppose you have," agreed Jane obliquely.

"Shall I dry them boots for you ? "

Wally gave her the boots. He stood and looked at her for a moment more, then turned and stole slowly away.

"Walks like a cat as has lost its whiskers," was Jane's mental comment as she watched him go. Then she put his shoes over the stove to dry, and when they were done took

them up to him without delay. That one descent into her domain was sufficient to her for the day at least.

It was Jane's duty to sweep out the shop every morning while the Marbury family breakfasted. At five minutes to eight the errand boy arrived to take down the shutters : at the hour the shop opened. The preceding work, therefore, was done either by candlelight, or by the soft infiltrations of outer day which, as the mornings lengthened, crept through the fanlight of the door and the small heart-shaped slots of the shutters.

This was the one moment of beauty in Jane's daily round. The shop in its darkened state seemed holy and mysterious, a place to worship in. From the central lunette and the eight small eye-holes, bands and slants of light passed searchingly through a mote-laden air, and moving solemnly from point to point as day advanced, revealed, amid the circumferent gloom, strange patches of colour and problems of form difficult for the eye to solve. The black tea-canisters with lettering of tarnished gold appeared then like treasure coffers : sago and rice bins gleamed like snow-drifts, indian corn like amber, candied peel like stalactite, sugar like cut jewels ; strings of onions mounted like spiral columns to the roof ; even the rough sides of deal crates took on a smouldering glory as the grail-bearing beams of day passed over them.

Through these threads of light, which broke and re-extended across her path, Jane moved with a deft rapacious energy, sweeping up the accumulated litter of trade ; and as the eddying gold of the raised dust span about her, her heart was jubilant at its morning song. Then came the boy's summons at the door, the clattering down of the shutters ; and the domestic dust-bin was handed out, to await with others the call of the scavenger's cart.

The circumstances were ordinary enough ; but it was ever with fire in her eye that Jane smote the common chords of life and took stock, for spiritual ends, of the day's routine. Whether she ground coffee, made beds, lit fires, swept shop, or washed stone basement floors, there was

always a something behind the task, or within it, that gave space for the mind to move, and lent to her performance of menial offices an air of exaltation which to some mistresses did not seem quite respectful: for the slave who plays at his work forgets his station, and becomes guilty thereby of spiritual presumption. "We love the place," sang Jane, and did so very faithfully in certain relations, remembering for after years how like a gate of glory at her early rising had been those shafts of light revolving through the dull obscurity of a grocer's shop, but having their hinges in the sun.

Regularly at half-past seven, the house stairs creaked to a descending weight, and "Jane, don't sing!" came the fat voice of Mrs. Marbury from the back parlour. Then for a while the young bird in her heart dropped to its nest, for this meant that the daily family life of her employers had begun; and though through the ensuing twelve hours it occupied her much, her communal part in it was small.

Nevertheless, the invincible cheer and sociability of Jane's character made barriers hard to maintain; in course of time, though still excluding her from the corporate life, they sought her out individually, imposing upon her open mind in queer broken sections a picture puzzle of the family loves and hates. The girls came to her with nasty little secrets about themselves and others; their whole lives were laden with tale-bearings, for the moral pickings of their nearest of kin they were like harpies at a feast. Against their brother more especially they directed a congregated loathing which nevertheless was proprietary in its character. It satisfied their pride that so unpleasing a person should belong to them. "Don't you hate him?" they would ask insistently; and had she said "yes" they would have gone and told. In this funny eaged existence of theirs they were all wonderfully alive. Close contact served to sharpen the edges of their characters, and family institutions to inflame their mutual dislike.

On Wally's birthday his sisters, compelled by custom, presented him with tokens of their affection, generally some small article of needlework the accomplishment of which

had served to curtail their leisure during the preceding weeks. Matilda's gift upon one of these occasions was a notebook. His enjoyment of it was brief: upon the day following, enraged by her mother's gross partiality, Matilda, adept in such matters, filled her tongue with ink, and bestowing a black lick upon every page obliterated its usefulness.

"That's for Wally having all the butter," she remarked when she had finished the operation under the awe-struck and ecstatic gaze of her two sisters. Their admiration of the act did not prevent them from bringing it to their brother's knowledge, for they felt that he ought to know. Wally said nothing, but leaving the book open upon the parlour table provoked an inquiry from which, having provided too many witnesses, Matilda could not escape.

She would have been well slapped for it had not her brother very Christianly intervened; and having, with yet more hatred in her heart, begged his pardon, and received from him the kiss of forgiveness, she was made during the ensuing weeks to forgo her pocket-money till a fresh free-will offering had been provided. For this infliction she punished her parents by stealing sugar from the shop while Wally, in sole charge, sat reading Scripture; and having thus rendered his stewardship inefficient, her hatred of him subsided to the normal level which made life just bearable.

Wally, also, revealed himself to Jane as time went on in ways of his own. Escaping for a moment from bored attendance in the shop, he would come down to inquire what dinner was going to be, would open the oven to see how a pudding was getting on, then stand, and after a moment of heavy breathing drop a text at her and go. His life seemed oddly compounded of a love for stern theology and rich food, and his only happy hours those spent in searching the Scriptures or in devouring a meal. Persistently he exceeded both in reading and eating, to the obvious detriment of his health, a habit which might be held to account for a tendency to walk in his sleep which Jane presently discovered in him. She heard this first from Matilda, who told it with malicious joy, and for a while afterwards thought

it true. "I've seen him do it," said his sister. "Mother doesn't know; she'd be frightened. She always thinks Wally's going to die. I wish he would. Don't you?"

A good deal happened in that household which Mrs. Marbury did not know. Her gross embodiment kept her from much movement; only once during the day did she descend to the kitchen, at other times preparing in the back parlour dishes which must go downstairs to be cooked. She was very deft with her fat hands, and like a spider stationary in its web kept adroit hold on the material workings of her establishment, but as to its moral tendencies knew little, and sedentary in mind as in body did not want to know.

Within her limitations she was charitably disposed, liking to see a reflection of her own comfort in the lives of others, and avoiding contact so far as possible where that could not exist. An absorbing selfishness for the welfare of her son stood as her crowning virtue; with that for subject her tongue would roll softly for hours, and willing hearers sat in her good graces; but in the family they were few. Her husband she treated with a sort of calculating respect: and he and the shop would have done their duty, and the world be in its place, when a way could be found for Wally's wish to enter the ministry. This was the one spiritual point toward which her domestic ambitions centred.

The motherly aim had a touching simplicity about it which drew Jane's sympathy; and she was well inclined to believe, when first told of it, that so absorbing a desire for ministry of the Word in one so young must needs stand for virtue. Keen in her quest of human nature, she sought anxiously for light on a character otherwise obscure.

Mrs. Marbury found presently that she liked to have Jane to talk to. At times when her work was of a sedentary character and other members of the family away, she would have the girl in to sit with her: on other occasions would prolong her morning visit to the kitchen, and hold discourse while Jane carried on her task within earshot.

Her way of conversation was to start without preliminary

at the point to which thought had brought her ; conveying by this economical process the suggestion that her hearer's mind had moved conformably with her own. Thus one day, after her eye had rested for a while on Jane's lithe figure moving actively to and fro, she sat with suspended needle to ask, " Was he fond of you, Jane ? "

" Only now and then, ma'am," replied Jane.

The answer seemed unexpected. She considered matters for a while, then said, " But weren't you fond of him ? "

Jane stiffened a little. " No, ma'am."

" But surely you're fond of the child ?

" Oh yes, ma'am ; I'm fond of him."

" Do they let you go and see it ? "

" Only once a month, ma'am. They don't let me go more often than they can help."

" When you go, does he know who you are ? "

" No, ma'am. That's not allowed. I'd to promise that—after I'd come here—before they'd let me see him."

Jane's lip quivered. That hurt her pride more than most things ; and yet to this dull obtuse mind she could speak of it more easily than to others. Mrs. Marbury's largeness and her total absence of corners gave to her interrogations a blandly impersonal tone. In a curious roundabout way she had won Jane's liking.

The fat woman heaved a comfortable sigh. " Ah, it's a sad world. And sometimes I've thought it might have done better with fewer men. Things would have been easier."

" It would have given some more room to turn round in," suggested Jane as a ground for agreement.

Mrs. Marbury seemed to take this as personal.

" I didn't mean just that," she corrected. " There's room for us all. It's morals I was thinking of. Men, where women are concerned—there's no trusting 'em—not at the end of a barge-pole, there isn't." She leaned forward with communicative eye. " When I first married—I was young then," she said impressively. " My husband's brother was with him in the business ; and he— Oh well, I'd better not say anything now. He's done very well in a

business of his own since then, with a wife and a family. They come over and see us sometimes : but what I know, I know."

She paused, ruminated, and went on. "Of course they aren't all like that—else where should we be? Mr. Marbury was always what he ought to be, and my Wally's an angel: he's not like other young men at all. Why! do you know?"—she leaned forward again, the fat voice became eager in its tones: "The last servant but one that we had, Wally came straight and told me about her; and she had to go. And she keeping company all the time with a young man of her own! It isn't many young men as are like my dear Wally, I'm afraid."

Warm to her subject the fat woman rambled on. Jane gave sympathetic hearing but remained unimpressed: she was not of a tale-bearing character—Wally apparently was.

"And with all his learning too!" the fond mother went on; "it's a world's pity he isn't in the ministry. But they think he's too young for it yet."

"He reads a great deal, don't he?" said Jane.

"Ah! but you should hear him testify. He's got the real gift for it, and always had. When he was a small child he used to get up on a chair and speak beautiful words. We'd have neighbours come in to hear him; and whenever any one asked, 'I'm going to be the preacher' he used to say. But, you see, there's the shop!" she dropped hands from her work and sat depressed. "His father says that he can't spare him; and of course business counts. When it's been in the family so long you can't let it go just anywhere. Selling, you don't get the full value as you do when you're in it yourself. And the name, too: it all counts. Yes, I'm troubled about Wally—that he's got to wait: it makes him broody to have things hanging undecided like. He don't seem to see his way; and now his eyes trouble him."

On this new theme of interest she discoursed at large; and Jane sat and thought of the half-shut eyes, and the hung-forward head, but could not like him the better though she summoned pity for his infirmity to her aid.

And still, when he sought her company, she avoided him.

A week later, at a probation meeting, she heard him hold forth, and had to admit that his discourse impressed her. Ugly, dislikeable, self-absorbed though he seemed, he had a moving gift of utterance; and when he spoke, aloof and with closed eyes as one oblivious to the outside world, the word came from him with power. The message he had to deliver was gloomy enough in all conscience, and to present-day ears may sound grotesque; yet according to the tenets of the connexion it was good sound doctrine, and the congregation heard him with appetite.

He took his text, with chapter and verse, from one of those more unfortunate sayings of St. Paul, which Manichæistic commentators have so fruitfully turned to mischief. "O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Heaving it forth with a groan, he paused to let the full weight of it fall upon his hearers before he went on.

Jane watched the dull upturned face and the shut eyes, as he stood motionless, a groper in thick darkness, waiting for pentecostal fire to descend. Presently, as by a blank opaque light from above, his features became illumined and at the spirit's bidding he began.

It was a teaching that Jane had heard often before, of that divinely provident separation between soul and body, whereby man stumbling through mire may still remain a vessel of honour sanctified by grace; but though familiar she had never heard it put with such earnestness of conviction or such demanding force as now. Why man was wretched and miserable, he plainly showed: also that 'body of death,' gross, unavoidable, inseparable from present conditions of clay-like material, wherein the spirit took root of earth and thence reached upward for air and light. So, though he groans for deliverance from that bondage, yet must man rejoice that through bondage alone shall his soul attain the stature ordained for it by Heaven. "Here in this life," said the preacher, "death hath dominion; we are all under its law, and must all pass through corruption

to grace ; there is no other way. And the corruption that is in us through life, what is it but a foretaste of that corruption of death through which we shall all be changed to glory ? The body is with us, we cannot be rid of it ; and everything that the body doth worketh death. That is the flaming sword which drove Adam and Eve out of paradise, and which still guards the gate, turning itself every way ; neither to right nor to left can we pass it by. To reach paradise or hell you must go through with it : there are only two ways : either you must fall beneath it and be of the flesh, or remain in the spirit and rise above. The body carries man along with it, and according to the law of nature worketh death. But the law of grace aboundeth within us, and if we live by grace what the body doth it doth unto itself alone, and over the spirit hath no mastery, because by new birth God giveth us the victory. For while the body worketh sin, the soul by faith receiveth grace—yea, and shall receive it more abundantly. That which my body doth is not I : but that which my spirit willeth that I am. The body of itself is nothing : but the spirit through the body cometh unto life. The body is not the living grain, though it be sown : but the grain cometh not to the harvest except it die. And even as virtue done in the body alone is ineffectual for grace, and shall not save a man, so sin which is done by the body alone is ineffectual also for damnation : and so, if a man have faith, he shall not die.”

Thus with feet stuck fast in the slough of despond, Wally lifted his pæan of victory. Suddenly the light went out of his face, he stopped short, uttered a deep sigh, and sat down.

Jane was much impressed. “He preaches terribly well,” she said to herself. She saw Mrs. Marbury mopping her eyes, and the three girls maliciously excited over Wally’s public success, the glory of which would redound upon them at school to-morrow. In that quarter of an hour he had got nearer to the ministry and the right of walking through life dressed in black than ever before. Mr. Marbury had begun thinking of getting a paid assistant in the

shop, for he saw now that it would have to come. Over these fermentations of spirit in the Marbury family the rest of the service passed making but little impression ; nobody else could testify as Wally had done.

When they got home Wally sat in a state of collapse, breathing heavily and very pale. His mother made him a bowl of sweet arrowroot mingled with whisky and subtly flavoured with spice : and as Jane laid supper for the rest, she heard him eating it in large slobbering mouthfuls, seated in an arm-chair by the hearth, hunched and miserable to behold.

This, then, was the road to his desire ; and more sharply than ever before she felt pity for him then. The next night as she went up to her room he stood at the top of the attic stair with head thrust forward and eyes closed, the figure of one physically and mentally blind. Abruptly she turned and went back the way she had come, and that night, having no lock to her own door, slept in the linen-closet—not, as it so happened, for the first time.

CHAPTER XI

A TAINTED WETHER

JANE'S earlier experience in such matters had been the outcome of long acquaintance and intimacy, not without some share of liking. It was a new thing to find herself confronted, on a basis almost of aloofness and dislike, with such a demonstration of male desire as made Tom's frank animalism attractive by comparison.

Mr. Wally was not man enough for Jane to go in physical fear of him, nor as a wooer was it in him to say things attractive to her ear; yet when, now and again, he stood before her silent, unyielding, repellent, a passive obstacle in her path, she knew without further telling that the old thorn in the flesh was up against her under a new guise. Abruptly he would come out of a door to meet her, stand, retire again, uttering no word. His very silence made these apparitions impressive. Over the bulging eyes, the puckered lids would lie half closed, and the head with out-thrust jaw hang heavy, listless, unalert yet formidable. It was as though some dull demon had taken hold of him and walked with him in his sleep. But that earlier explanation of these uncanny appearances Jane had soon to discard, as shock after shock of challenge, insidious, hypnotic in character, was directed against her. After measuring for a while her resistances and her silences, Wally began methodically to unmask the expression of those physical needs wherein his spirit had no concern.

Jane's chamber lay up aloft, sharing with store-closets and a large box-room the top floor of the establishment. At night, when by rights no one but herself should be there, she began to have encounters difficult to face,

impossible to avoid except by retreat. This cold wooer threatened her with no violence : it was his silent waiting presence which constituted the affront—that, and the heavily hung head and the shut eyes. Like a stone image he offered himself to her gaze, as though a thing apart from the waking reasonable being of the daylight hours.

Far back in the world's fevered history, women desiring to be fruitful had offered themselves to blind emblems, making a cult of the monstrosity, pious and sincere ; and, say what we will, these atavisms are still strong in our midst. Jane knowing nothing of such obscure origins tried to think of him as mad and with pity, even while the memory of the stark figure and the closed eyes filled her with a passion of revolt. But all the pity she had for him, and her cool indifferent rejection of his advances, wrought no cure. When the rest of the family were abed, Wally continued to walk like a restless ghost, with appearances and rappings recurrent as the changes of the moon.

The persecution to which he thus subjected her was not made less monstrous by the fact that no trace of it showed in the ordinary daily intercourse. For many days at a stretch Wally would be perfectly correct in his behaviour, cold, indifferent, a little ungracious, he would claim an attendance or give an order as though the small currency of domestic service were the only matter in which they had common concern ; and this not only in the presence of others, but when they met apart. Yet, however long extended, these normal interludes were always liable to sudden and capricious changes ; and even when he presented himself under the most serious and impeccable aspect, there was ever a consciousness that by the silent machinations of his will he still sought to obsess her mind.

How far he would have succeeded in making life on these terms impossible for her is a question the solution of which intervening circumstances came to disturb. One day, on returning from school, Jessie, the youngest, complained of pains, headache, and nausea. Put to bed with hot drinks and cossetings, she awoke next morning with spots and a high temperature. In the course of the next

two days Hetty and Matilda took over the symptoms with the alacrity common to youth where epidemics are concerned.

The doctor pronounced it to be measles : Matilda's case was the worst.

She was also the most difficult of the three patients to manage. Mrs. Marbury, after an encounter with the sick tantrums of her eldest daughter, and having been well slapped at for her pains, descended ponderously to the back parlour, and there depositing her impotent weight of flesh, dissolved into tears. "I can't do anything with 'em," she wailed, "not now, when they know I can't smack 'em. It's those up-and-down stairs are the finishing of me ! My feet go up, but my heart drops out piecemeal by the way. It's an awful thing to be a body when there's illness in the house. And there's Matilda won't let me wash her with the lotion, and she's upset the basin on the floor : if you don't go and mop it up, Jane, it'll be coming through."

It was coming through already. Jane went up and took her place.

In the first day she scored an easy victory over the difficulties to which her faint-hearted mistress had succumbed, merely by accepting them : slappings had no terror for her, and fractious tempers only amused. Weak and bedridden, she found her three charges more attractive than when up, and doing to her detriment all the things they ought not to do ; and as one may become fond of caged ferrets—especially when frail of appetite they droop their bloodthirsty little heads upon beds of straw and languish for death—so did Jane find her heart charged with a new charity toward these weakened specimens of the Marbury breed ; and pitying the reduction of those vital energies which had been her torment, developed presently almost a liking for the exiguous qualities which remained. When the much-reduced Matilda ceased biting the spoon with which she was fed and showed her tongue to the doctor without pride, when they ceased to tell tales of each other or to indulge in verbal sparrings from bed to

bed, when they submitted without protest to a change of sheets, and were glad to have their pimpled faces washed and their red hair combed, when all these things marked their depressed conditions, they belonged more closely to the great human family than in the savage herding to which their ordinary home life had condemned them.

Rumours of the beauty of their fallen nature reached downstairs; Wally came up to look at them, and so far as it was in him to do so showed kindness and attention. As they advanced toward recovery he came daily to the door, bringing them sweet things from the shop to cover the taste of their medicine, or word perhaps of what was to be for dinner when their appetite had crept back to the stage of sharing it. And his sisters lay and looked at him with interest and without hatred, for now the fierce rivalries of family life were in abeyance, and his existence no longer smote them in their tender spots. When they had rice pudding it was their own, with all the skin on it; and Wally's best place before the fire, with feet planted in the fender, was no longer the daily grievance it had once been and would be again. So much had a little separation done to restore the unity of the family bond: pity that it could not last!

On one occasion he brought a book of coloured fashion-plates, on another a bag of oranges, and of these told Jane to take two herself: he had heard, he said, that they were good to prevent infection.

The remedy came rather late, but Jane felt the kindness of the intention, the more so as Wally for the last three weeks—ever since the measles began in fact—had been perfectly well-behaved. If she thought of his past conduct now, it was compassionately: she supposed that he could not help it. Religion, she knew, took people in strange and unexpected ways, and this might be one of them. She remembered old Caleb Gronning preaching in the wood, very drunk but very satisfied with himself; she remembered the Mother Superior piously depriving her of her child; even in the Bible there were examples of a similar kind. Nothing but religion could have made

Cain kill Abel, or Abraham be willing to sacrifice his son, or Samuel to cut up Agag, or Joseph to put away his wife privily (for to Jane's simple understanding and her reading of the law of Moses—confirmed elsewhere—the meaning of that sentence was death).

Perhaps it was the suppressed religion in Wally's life which had made him do these things ; perhaps if he could only be allowed to break out in religion and the ministry of the Word, he would become decent and reputable in other directions. She prayed that the congregation, at its forthcoming annual meeting, would select Wally as its nominee for training in the ministry ; then he would be sent to their theological seminary and all would be well. Thus she meditated, being ever an optimist where human nature was concerned.

She had other reasons for feeling cheerful : her nursing had been successful, her measles patients were well on the mend, and in the eyes of her employers she had ' made good ' to such an extent that, without the asking, they had granted her a rise in wages, from three to four pounds a year. Mr. Marbury when paying her quarter's salary had added an extra half-crown, " because of the trouble she'd taken." Mrs. Marbury had given her one of her old dresses—quite a good one—with enough material in it to make two for herself, and a large piece over for mendings ; also some old baby-linen of fine quality, minutely wrought, things that had been worn by Wally in his days of innocence. Her heart was uplifted within her ; the world was beginning to be kind. She sent the money to her mother, made a parcel of the baby-clothes for her next visit to the orphanage when the danger of infection should be over, and in her spare time started dressmaking.

And then her spirits had to come down with a run ; for when danger of infection was over, her immunity from persecution ceased, and Wally, aggressive in the flesh, once more stood before her. Jane could have cried with vexation, but it would have done no good. " I'm sorry for you, Mr. Wally ! " she said. " I'm sorry for myself," he replied, with a tone of such earnest conviction that

there was no getting beyond it. Like Lot's wife she apprehended him thenceforth as something monumental—a symbol for avoidance, but beyond her understanding. Taking her solitary courses at a run, she jumped the shoek of him, and prayed for the day to be hastened when he would depart to his training for the ministry.

The day of the annual meeting arrived; Mr. and Mrs. Marbury both attended. Mr. Marbury gave his vote, and Wally was the selected candidate. He took the news which they brought home to him in a spirit of Christian resignation, feeling the responsibility of it, and showing no joy. In the evening, when they went out again to collect the congratulations of neighbours, Wally willed to remain at home. Supper was finished, the shop was closed: Jane at the appointed time went up to see that the children were in bed, and to give them their mixtures for the night.

These duties done, she descended light of step, looking ahead over the banisters to see that the way was clear.

The parlour door was ajar, and a light shone within; she passed it at a run and reached her own domain in the basement without incident. Then she started on the washing-up to the accompaniment of a cricket behind the hearth, of whose nasty little note, as of most other things, she had become fond.

Ten minutes later she heard Wally's voice over the stair-rail above, demanding more coal. With a tightening of the chest she obeyed the summons, and to shorten matters took up with her a full scuttle for exchange with the one above.

A glance told her that Wally had gone to the bad again: the excitement of the day had been too much for him: religious repression had got upon his nerves. Without entering she deposited the scuttle at the threshold and returned to her domain. But though she tried to think charitably, her anger was kindled against him. "Some day I'll have to give him a lesson," she said to herself. "He wants a good putting down and there's only me as dares give it him." Then to throw off the irritation she

tackled her work with energy. The dishes clattered, the cricket's voice was hushed.

Presently as she crossed the kitchen, dipper in hand, to fetch boiling water from the large pan on the range, she heard a step softly descending the basement stair.

At this indication of an invasion of her peace more definite than he had yet attempted, her blood grew hot. Upstairs the ground was common territory, even on the top floor he had the excuse of the box-room and the store-cupboards if he wished to visit it; but here down below at this hour he had none. Well, if it must be so, he should have his lesson now.

With filled dipper in hand, she stood, tense with anger and excitement, hearing the slow creak of the stair. In another moment the door would open and the unpleasantness of his presence again be upon her. She looked at the door, measuring her distance; she looked at the dipper—the hot water steamed encouragingly.

At that moment the cricket behind the wall started to chirp again. Whether it was that little voice of nature which effected her conversion from a deed of savage retaliation, who can say? Jane herself did not know what fluke saved her, nor could she be sufficiently thankful, when she came to cooler reflection, for the moderating influence which at that moment drew her to the water-tap to add to her justice some small seasoning of mercy.

While her own hand was upon the tap, Wally's was upon the door; the handle turned and the slow, blundering figure, with half-shut eyes and ferret-like lift of head, stood to view.

Jane turned sharply about, out swung the bowl, and Wally became like a naiad in a fountain, as its watershed went over him.

His howl was of so resounding a kind, and his bolt upstairs so precipitate and complete, that for one moment an agitating doubt possessed her whether she had not left the water too hot after all. She listened. There came from above no moans of a creature in pain—only the slow, stealthy tread of Wally going up to his room.

"I've give him just enough!" she told herself, as she mopped up the mess that she had made, and sighed, satisfied. Then she went back to the range to refill the dipper with the water needed for the washing-up; and still a little agitated she spoke once more to reassure herself:

"I've give our new minister his 'oly orders: and I 'ope they've took."

CHAPTER XII

THE HOT WATER CURE

THE next day, which was Saturday, Wally was quite correct and reserved in his behaviour when he and Jane met. It was the busy day in the shop, and they encountered but seldom. On the Sunday Jane went to see her babe—a visit which recent events had delayed out of due time.

It was a seven-mile walk each way. She went joyously, carrying her bundle of baby-linen, and did not return till late.

No apparition waited for her upon the stairs. Confident and reassured, she felt that a real clean-up had been accomplished, and that Wally, having learnt his lesson, would trouble her no more. Her life was blessed to her; sounds sweeter than bird or brook gurgled in her ear, little hands had hold of her heart—eyes that met hers in recognition with laughter and delight. And though for a while she must relinquish the daily possession, she looked forward surely to a time when her displaced right would be restored to her; and if it were only a question of religion, Jim might hail Mary as much as he liked, dip in holy water, have a crucifix to pray to, wear scapulas and amulets back and front, and be a Papist to his life's end. It was all very roundabout; but, except where statues showed hollow insides, it didn't mean anything contrary to the love of God.

On these thoughts she slept soundly, and woke to the Monday morn.

It was the day when an outsider came to give help with the week's washing. Shortly after breakfast Mrs.

Marbury sent Jane out to do an errand: the children were going for a drive in a neighbour's trap—their first airing on the road to convalescence. "I wish I could go too," sighed the poor victim of habit; "but I am afraid there wouldn't be room enough." She named the hour for the trap to call. There were also some purchases to be made.

As Jane went through the shop the monthly stock-taking was going on. Mr. Marbury was up on the steps among the stores, Wally checking the books. He did not look at her as she passed.

"Best sultanas—fifteen," called Mr. Marbury, counting the packages as they lay.

"That's three missing," said Wally.

The grocer looked down puzzled. "I don't know how that can be," he said. "There've been no sales so far as I know."

"Should be eighteen," said Wally, sticking his pencil against the item as though holding it down.

"Well, you must have put them in the wrong bin," said his father. "We shall come to them presently."

But before long there were other shortcomings to report.

"Things have got wrong somehow," said the grocer, getting annoyed. "It's what I told you. You haven't been keeping proper account."

"Oh, I suppose it's got to be me, if you say so," replied Wally with sour patience.

"Who else?"

"How should I know?"

The investigation went on; and the incident recurred. Mr. Marbury rubbed his head irritably. "I've never known this happen before," said he.

"Nor I," said his son.

"Queer!" He climbed down from his perch to have a look at the books. Wally, as though washing his hands of the business, moved aside to a row of glass-covered cases, placed for show. There, after standing a while, he began peering down at the floor.

"Jane hasn't swept the shop properly," he said. He stooped and gathered up a small sprinkling of rice.

“How did that come there?” inquired the grocer.

“I don’t know,” said Wally. “Somebody spilled it, I suppose.”

When they came to examine, there were other spillings as well—quite a lot.

“Some one’s been at these bins,” observed Mr. Marbury with a sharpened note of suspicion.

“Couldn’t have been the children,” said Wally. “They haven’t been down.”

“Sugar, raisins, candy, soda,” went on the grocer, checking the list of shortages. “And soap, too! I don’t know what to think of it.”

By the time Jane had returned from her errands, a decision what to think had been reached. As she came through the shop laden with parcels—“You’d better take those in to your mistress,” said Mr. Marbury, and followed her to the back parlour.

With the door shut upon her entry, Jane found three very solemn faces confronting her.

“Here’s something we want cleared up,” said her master. “I don’t make no charge: I only want to know.”

Jane opened her eyes: instinctively she looked at Wally. Was it the hot water they wanted to know about?

Wally sat inscrutable: she could get no sign from him.

Mrs. Marbury, distressed and ill at ease, caught up a breath, and plunged into the middle of things as her way was. “Jane, you’d better own up,” she said. “Your master doesn’t want to be hard on you.”

Mr. Marbury, waving his wife off, put things in their right order. “Young woman,” he said, “things are missing from the shop.”

“What things?” inquired Jane mildly, not yet awake to the character of the charge that hung over her.

“Eatables mostly.” His tone was solemn. “Sugar’s one of ’em.”

“Oh, it’s natural enough!” broke in Mrs. Marbury, wishing to be charitable. “And one can understand and excuse it if it just happens once. I know you’ve a sweet tooth, Jane; so you’d better own to it.”

"D'you mean as I've took them?" demanded Jane, as the meaning of the words flashed.

"That's what we've got to find out," said Mr. Marbury grimly. "We'll have to go up and look in your room."

Jane's face hardened. "You can go," she said.

"You'd better come too," recommended the grocer. "I'll be fair to you. I don't want to search into things behind your back."

Mrs. Marbury, foreseeing possibilities, rambled to meet them. "If you've eaten 'em, Jane, you've only to say so. We'll take it out of your wages and say no more."

"She can't have eaten the soap," objected the grocer, getting back to facts.

"We'd better go up, Father," said Wally.

"Oh dear!" sighed the heavy one, "I wish I hadn't to!"

Upstairs they went in procession, Jane last. But on the first landing Mrs. Marbury stopped to pant. "All of you go on!" she said; "I'll follow. These stairs do catch my breath so."

They passed ahead, and heard her labouring up behind.

In Jane's small room, beneath a projecting ledge which served as dressing-table, the rose-papered box stood under the window. "You'd better unlock that," said her master, pointing.

"It hasn't got no lock," said Jane. "Whatever's there, you can open it and see."

"If she's artful, they'll be in the bed."

It was Mrs. Marbury, saying the sensible thing as she arrived.

Mr. Marbury drew out the box, raised the lid, and looked. All was very orderly. Then he lifted away a top layer of dress material ("I gave her that," Mrs. Marbury explained)—then of under-garments.

"Ah!" he ejaculated then.

"Oh, Father!" cried Wally in scandalized tones.

"Oh, Jane!" cried Mrs. Marbury, wedging her way in to share the sight. "To think of your doing such a thing! I wouldn't have believed it possible."

Jane looked too. If these were her pilferings she had certainly done the thing handsomely.

"Lor', what a game!" she involuntarily exclaimed, and stood gazing at the neatly stacked articles which filled the floor of her box. Of such large depredations no stocktaking, however perfunctory in its routine, could have missed discovery.

Mr. Marbury ran an expert eye over the contents.

"Sugar, raisins, figs, prunes, tea, rice, candy, currants, pickles, curry-powder. "My word!" he cried, "there's no end to it!" The monstrosity of the appetite thus revealed staggered him.

"It isn't the amount that matters," interposed Wally, "it isn't the cost. It's the sinfulness of it: it's the depravity."

At these words the strings of Jane's understanding were loosed. She took one more look at the neatly stowed parcels, then, with a little squeak, threw up her hands and sat down on the bed.

Mrs. Marbury was the only one who turned to look at her; for the other two the box with its contents was still the main attraction. "What are you laughing for?" she cried indignantly. "Heartless girl!"

Jane beat her hands. "I can't 'elp," she said. The spirit took her, she became voiceless; letting herself go she lay along the bed, her hands flapped in an ecstacy of appreciation, her laughter pealed.

"None of your hysterics!" said Mr. Marbury with stern discrimination.

"Jane!" entreated her mistress, much distressed. But Jane's head only wagged from side to side.

"Oh, don't!" she pleaded, "you are nearly killing me! Do go away, all of you!"

But her master had his duty to perform: he must first extract from Jane a proper confession of her guilt.

"So that's what it comes to, is it?" he said; "taking you without a character: I might have known. Well, what have you to say?"

"Oh, I've brought it on myself, there isn't a doubt,"

admitted Jane. "I've got myself into hot water now, that I 'ave!"

She got up and looked, and sat down again. "It's them pink parcels!" she cried, and fell again to ribald mirth.

"You don't seem to understand the seriousness of your position," said the grocer, much affronted by her levity.

"Oh yes, I do."

"D'you know you could be charged?"

"But I don't think you are going to," said Jane.

"Why not?"

"I couldn't tell yer."

"I should think not, indeed! Have you nothing else to say?"

"No, leave it as it is! I wouldn't spoil it," pleaded Jane.

They stood and looked at her in perplexity—Wally as much puzzled as the rest. But he, too, had a duty to perform, of which he now reminded himself.

"If you will repent, Jane, of what you have done—of what you *know* you have done—I will ask my father to let you stay."

Jane smiled on him. "You couldn't put it nicer, Mr. Wally," she said, "not if you was to try ever so. But I'd rather not. There's some things you'd better leave alone. I'm one of 'em."

They exchanged looks. Wally did not flinch. "He's got a nerve," said Jane to herself, admiring him then.

From below was heard the jangling of the shop-door bell.

"Shop," said Wally. "I'd better go down."

He got as far as the door. Jane said, "Ain't you going to take any of those things back with you, Mr. Wally? They need a deal of carrying."

This single shaft Jane sped at him; but the imperturbability of his demeanour was not shaken; vouchsafing no answer he disappeared.

Mrs. Marbury was mopping her eyes. "Jane, I'm ashamed of you," she said.

"I'm almost ashamed of myself," replied the culprit: "for I suppose one ought to tell the truth, but I just can't."

"You needn't," retorted Mr. Marbury. "Words won't alter facts. And you be out of this house by twelve o'clock, young woman, else it'll be the law!"

At this Mrs. Marbury gave free vent to her grief. "Oh, Jane," she cried, "and to think of your doing this after we'd just raised your wages!"

"She won't get 'em," said the grocer vindictively.

"No, I suppose not," assented his wife. "You could hardly expect it, could you? But the dress I gave you, you can keep that."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Jane gratefully. She was very sorry for her mistress.

Mrs. Marbury broke into fresh wail. "Oh dear, what'll I do without her? I'd got fond of you, Jane; the first one I ever had. But what's the use of training 'em and doing one's best—if they go and behave like this. Oh there!" She flapped her hands, and cast off domestic charity henceforth as an unprofitable thing.

Wally reappeared in the door. "Mother, come down," he said. "It's the trap: they are waiting to go."

With another sigh Mrs. Marbury heaved up her weight from the chair which had shared her groans, and submitting to the call of duty departed from the scene; Wally preceded her, and Mr. Marbury, not considering it proper to remain with the young woman in her bedroom alone, came after.

Jane, left to her own devices, returned to the box. At the sight of the pink parcels her lips twitched again; there was something comic in their colour—the blush of modesty and truth, over the task which had been imposed on them. "So you've found a way to punish me, have you?" she remarked genially to the absent one, adding with a thorough appreciation of his character, "I wish I could have known more of yer!" After this episode she would have dearly liked once again to hear him preach. Then she began counting the parcels out.

"I almost think I must have scalded him," she said to herself, as though nothing else could account for the scale to which vengeance had been piled.

"Hates me . . . hates me . . . hates me." One by one she deposited the packages on the floor, giving credit to Wally's feelings as she did so. "Scald me, will yer! There's pink for yer, ye hussy!" "Twenty-seven," she counted at last. "To think of me stealing all that! I wonder how many times he had to dodge up with 'em before I come back. He must have been clever, not to get caught." She set the three pink parcels on top.

Then she took down her sampler from over the bed and packed it with the rest of her belongings. The box now contained all she had in the world; and even with the dress material her mistress had left in her keeping it was not full. When she had put round it the old cord it had come in, all was ready to go.

She collected as many of the parcels as she could hold, and carried them down to the shop. Wally and his father were both there.

"Returned with thanks," she said, laying them on the counter. "Please, master, may I go out and order the carrier?"

"You may," said Mr. Marbury solemnly.

She went in to her mistress.

"If you please, ma'am," she said, "I'm going out to tell the carrier. Is there any more shoppings you want done?"

Mrs. Marbury answered from a throat of tears. "No, Jane, I must go and do them myself now. You aren't to be trusted."

"Can't I order nothing, ma'am? You can trust me with that." *

Mrs. Marbury thought a moment, then she said, "You might take Matilda's bottle to the chemist and say we want another. Oh dear, what'll the children say when they hear you are going?"

"I'll be gone before they come back," replied Jane.

"Where are you going?"

"I don't know, ma'am. I shall try and find work near 'im."

“Your baby, you mean?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Mrs. Marbury’s heart smote her. “Oh, Jane, why can’t you say you’ve done wrong, and promise never to do it again? I don’t want you to go.”

But Jane was firm. “No, ma’am, I couldn’t promise,” she said. “You’ve got to take things as you find ’em in this house.”

“I’m sure I don’t know why,” complained the poor lady in bewilderment. “We didn’t starve you.”

“Oh no, ma’am; all I meant was I couldn’t promise. You see, it wouldn’t be safe.”

Mrs. Marbury had an inspiration. “You never said you did it, Jane! Could it have been one of the children? They might have done it just for a joke. . . . Oh! was that why you laughed?” But Jane dismissed the explanation.

“No, ma’am; it wasn’t done for a joke; nor it wasn’t one of them.” And then—for pity, and fear lest she had said too much—“And I never said I hadn’t done it either: you must please to remember that.”

With vague smothered dread Mrs. Marbury looked at her over a jaw half ready to drop. Then she bethought herself, reached out her hand and clawed up a piece of mending. “Oh well,” she whimpered, “call at the chemist’s for me, if you don’t mind. I don’t know what the world’s coming to! Then from the door she called her back. “And, Jane, here’s five shillings for you; it’s all I can spare. And it’s not my fault as you aren’t to be paid your wages, don’t think.”

“It doesn’t matter, ma’am,” said Jane.

“And Jane”—Mrs. Marbury leaned forward and spoke secretively—“I’ll give you your character, if I’m asked for it. Nobody need know.”

Thus, in a surreptitious and shamefaced way, did truth prevail over proof. It was a triumph of a kind: and Jane was still treasuring it in her heart when an hour later she left the premises.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ROUGH AND THE SMOOTH

Now, and ever after in life when Jane was upon her beam-ends—from a worldly point of view—her heart went up and sang. To be dispossessed, to be rid of ties, to have all the world before her from which to choose, and to find her spirit leading her by a way of its own, “this, like thy glory, Titan, was to be good, great, and joyous, beautiful and free.”

Thus roughly released by circumstance, there was not for one moment a doubt as to the way the spirit would take her. Leaving her poor box of belongings to the carrier's charge till called for, she set out to find a place within easier reach of the orphanage which was Jim's home; and with Mrs. Marbury's five shillings in her pocket spent a precarious week, but before it was all gone found employment upon a farm, where rising at dawn to a new range of usefulness she milked cows, churned butter, scrubbed pails, washed floors, and toiled in the field.

This, within two miles of her heart's desire, seemed to promise bliss: but the orphanage accorded to her coming no extension of the maternal privileges beyond those established by rule. Once a month was still the ration of joy allowed to her: not even her offer to work in the home without a wage could break down the barrier. Primitive Brotherhood was a disability still; and though she had little love for it, she had less for any religious yoke imposed upon such terms.

For two years she remained at the farm, and would have been content with the rough open-air life had not her mother's growing feebleness of health made it neces-

sary that she should seek a higher wage to supplement the home earnings.

With this aim she ascended the social scale, and entered a genteel family where four servants, an outside man, and a youth made up the establishment. Here for the first time she was in contact with people of trained manners and educated speech, and sensitive of ear found out that she dropped her aitches. Not having as yet turned preacher, she took no trouble to recover them; but in the Established Church which, as a condition of employment, she now attended, she grew more aware of the beauty of Scripture when, as sometimes happened, it was read with dignity and effect.

Back among class distinctions her free spirit was again assaulted by the institution of family prayers, which in the more communal life of the farm had found no place. At the summons of a bell the four servants entered the breakfast-room, the parlour-maid bearing the tray. This she set down on the sideboard, before which facing the wall the four menials knelt apart, while the family dispersed itself more comfortably over chair-cushions. Thus for approach to the throne of grace free individualism and drilled regularity knelt in opposed sections, and though all joined voices in the Lord's Prayer social distinction remained.

Prayer under these conditions has its effect, and is not to be despised as a means to the ordering of life. Employer and employed rose from their knees with a sense of duty done—of example set on the one hand and submissively endured upon the other—though with no access of love each to each, no drawing closer of the human bond. It was rather a ratification under the eye of Heaven (very proper at the time) of the distance set up on earth; yet probably, in a congregation normally of twelve, it only gave full satisfaction to two. For the younger members it stood as a hindrance between them and their food, for the servants between them and their work. Sometimes while prayer went on the back-door bell would ring; whereat the cook's breast would heave rebelliously against

the tray's edge, and she would wait impatient with knees pawing the ground, to be up and off in the direction where real life called her.

To Jane the trial was of a more physical kind. Like many thin people she was troubled by a large appetite, which an early breakfast at rising had insufficiently satisfied; and having to kneel so near to more appetizing viands destined for others diverted her thoughts all too easily from God. As the smell of the flesh-pots blended with the incense of prayer, she grew famished for the one full meal of the day lying so far ahead: and if theft had been a thing possible for her pride to stoop to, the temptation thereto would have lain in that daily juxtaposition to which religious observance subjected her.

In other respects the place was a good one: and had values educative and social, such as are now seldom to be found. Its housekeeping was of the complete kind usual during the first half of the nineteenth century, and for some decades later; and in stillroom, washhouse, and kitchen many things were done which are now more of commercial than domestic concern.

In those more spacious and intelligent economies Jane took a delight, which for a while endangered her spiritual development. Jams, curings, and distillings threw her into so great an enthusiasm that when their making came to a finish she could not but gloat over the storage of them, and view their depletion with a jealous eye. And when during a week of Christmas festivities a fired beam in the kitchen chimney carried conflagration to her beloved store-rooms, Jane wept bitter tears, and would rather have been burnt in her own bed than stand helpless beside that furnace where hams shrivelled on their hooks to fatten the flames, and the hurling in of water cracked the jam-pots more effectively than did the heat.

In the reaction which followed the scene of fright and confusion, Jane found herself crying on a man's chest, without quite knowing how she had come there.

It was the under-gardener fresh from fighting the flames, which, having consumed all that she most cared about,

had relinquished their larger prey and left her the roof. As a compensation for her lost jam he made her an offer of marriage, and seemed to think for a while that she had accepted him. He kissed her, patted her back, told her to be a good wench, and not to cry, also of promotion soon to be his, and bade her name the day. She smelt his singed whiskers, and his corduroys, which from exceeding dampness emitted their odour like evening stocks after rain. He was earthy, honest, and kindly; she liked his trade, she was also grateful to him for holding her in his arms at a time when she much needed it. But she did not want to marry him. This she explained; he was slow to believe it, but finally let her go, and being promoted head gardener the next week with a cottage on the premises, a month later had transferred his affections without difficulty and married somebody else.

It was Jane's first offer of marriage; and was followed by three others at intervals, which would have enabled her, had she chosen, to become the wife of a widowed carrier with ten children, of an under-gamekeeper, or of a young butcher who came daily in a smart trap to deliver meat. These legitimate offers gave her less trouble, being less persistently urged, than the illegitimate ones to which she was still occasionally subjected. At this time, in her early twenties that is to say, Jane must have been attractive above the average: not by mere looks, for her features lacked proportion, but she had a way with her which drew the favourable glances and something besides of men not always her own class. To one of these, highly her superior in social scale, she spoke her level mind in a way which was not then usual.

"Ah, you've got a healthy appetite," she remarked, disengaging herself without any show of moral indignation from his philandering embrace. "but you ain't going to make a meal o' me." The scene took place in her employer's house under circumstances favourable to the gentleman, and he did not at once desist.

"If I told about you," she said, "I should get sent away without a character." The remark seemed to get

home. While that was the rule of the game, it was manifestly a shady one for honest sportsmen to play.

Jane's comment on gentry as a class, after a mixed experience extending over five years, was simple and sufficiently embracing. "They aren't so bad when you get to know them," she remarked. "It isn't hearts they want, it's brains."

Fifteen years later, having then had an experience of prisons, she said the same of criminals. She also said it of the police, and of magistrates and of legal authorities in general. In her optimism about human nature Jane was incorrigible.

Her twenty-fifth year saw her back at her old home. Mrs. Mattock's health had at last given out; incapable of work and without means of subsistence she sent for her daughter to look after her, and to preserve over her head the free roof which went with the chapel caretaking.

In those days railways had only just begun, means of communication were few, and travelling to any distance beyond the pockets of the poor. During the eight years since Jane had left the parental roof she and her mother had only met once, and then for a special purpose as has been told. She had then submitted to the defeat of her dearest wishes; but now, as they re-encountered, the advantage was with her. Mrs. Mattock, in spite of faded health and decrepit spirit, was still a familiar character easy to read; Jane, on the other hand, had become a stranger, and was more than ever out of her mother's reckoning. Now also the dispensing power was hers, and the elder her dependent.

Within a week of the daughter's arrival she had become more so: even the roof which by long occupation she nominally provided was taken away from her. Old Caleb Gronning had fallen upon evil days, his legs having gone permanently from under him; and the community feeling that it owed a first duty to him, and regarding Jane's return to home duty as sufficient and providential for the widow's need, gave them notice to quit.

As a result Jane took two old birds under her vigorous

wing instead of one. Not Caleb, for he, poor man, had still a wife of his own, able now to enforce those strict teetotal principles which formerly he had evaded. Jane's second charge was the old basket-maker; now, like Mrs. Mattock, past work, almost bedridden and with his business falling away from him.

To the cottage by the osier-beds Jane went with her mother to give eyes once more to the dying man. With quick hands she resumed apprenticeship, took up the trade, and kept the two of them.

For the first six months, till old Bunny went to his last burrow, it was the hardest struggle that Jane was ever to experience, not rendered easier by Mrs. Mattock's tearful complaints of the situation wherein she found herself. She felt that she had come down in the world, and the fault was very largely Jane's. "If you'd been proper," she said, "and stayed at home, you'd have been married before this; and I could have come and lived with you." It was the whole duty of daughters, as then popularly preached, and as it has subsisted almost down to our own day.

"You are living with me," said Jane; "what's the difference?" But the difference was great: for a young woman of the labouring class to remain unmarried was in those days a singularity which invited question and caused surmise.

Mrs. Mattock was restless on the subject: she wanted the past to be covered by something more effectual than time. For it was the curious morality of that community that if there were whispers about a single woman's life, marriage put an end to them; after her attainment of the goal they counted no more. For other reasons, also, Mrs. Mattock was afraid of what Jane, left to herself, might do.

The day after old Bunny had been put peacefully to his bed of clay, Mrs. Mattock said to her daughter, "Jane, while he was carrying the coffin I saw Ben looking at you."

"He must have looked at me out of the back of his head, then," said Jane.

"Not all the time," replied her mother, as though allowing that a continual performance of the feat might be difficult. "He wants to marry you."

"Let him."

That sounded almost like hope. But Jane's thoughts lay in another direction. "I'm thinking about my boy," she said.

"What about him?" inquired her mother anxiously.

"Whether I couldn't have him now."

"Oh, you couldn't!" There was a world of prohibition in the tone.

"Yes, I could! I've found out. They've no right to him by law: not if I want to have him back again."

"But you couldn't have him back again," cried her mother, scandalized, "not now!"

"Why not?"

"People 'ud know."

"Let 'em! We haven't got the chapel to think of now."

"Oh, but you must marry Ben first. Then—p'raps."

Jane threw back her head and laughed. "What 'ud Ben say when he found out?" she inquired.

Mrs. Mattock amended her ground. "You'd know better once you was married. You wouldn't tell'n. You don't know what men are."

"Don't I?" said Jane, sceptical of her mother's superior knowledge in that direction. "Well, I'll have to think about it."

Mrs. Mattock began to cry.

"If he comes here I don't think I can bear it!" she said. "Everybody'll be saying things! And it'll be me, too." For if Mrs. Mattock had but a small understanding of hearts she had an understanding of tongues.

Jane sat contemplative a while. Her mother eyed her anxiously, fearing her silence even more than her words.

"Jane, don't!" she entreated at last.

Jane seemed not to heed.

"Pity I never had a brother," she observed meditatively. "I should have understood 'em better then, maybe. Why didn't you have a boy, mother? It's generally a boy as comes first."

Mrs. Mattock abandoned her reserves.

"I haven't ever told you before," she said. "I will now. I had a boy before ever you was born or thought of."

“What ? ” cried Jane.

The worn woman bowed her head ; age had made her almost fleshless to the past ; Jane’s plans for the present had become more terrible.

“Your father never knew,” she said. “If he had he’d never ’av married me. There’s some things you mustn’t let ’em know : that’s one of ’em.”

“You ! ” cried Jane, still lost in the wonder of it. “Looks as if it run in the family,” she added a little grimly.

“Don’t talk like that ! ” said her mother. “My case was different from yours. It come of us all living so crowded, twelve of us in two rooms ; and no mother to look after us, not then. You needn’t go asking any more. I only told you to keep you from doing the rash thing. You can’t have him back, I tell you. Who’d marry yer, with him there before their eyes ? ”

“I don’t care to marry any one,” said Jane.

“You’ll have to, you’ll find, some day. It comes to all of us.”

Jane’s thoughts were away back.

“What become of him ? ” she inquired.

“Who ? Oh, you mean that. He died, thank God, within a month. I ’adn’t long to be troubled with ’im. Nobody knew of it but those where I went. I’d almost forgotten it myself, till you come along and reminded me. That was a judgment, that was ! It was right it should be kep’ for me, and your poor father be spared knowing. It would ’ave about broke ’is ’eart.”

Thus Mrs. Mattock on the superior morality of men where others, not themselves, are concerned.

Jane heard, and before she knew it had let her dream go, her charitable pity for her mother being much greater than her respect. Now a fresh access of fellow-feeling, born of a common experience, drew her to the sad woman’s side. They did not often kiss, but she kissed her now ; and daughter to mother—“Ain’t men strange ? ” she said.

“Ah, they’re as God made ’em ! ” sighed the weary one, letting go the problem which in the years lying ahead Jane was to make so many efforts to solve.

BOOK II

HER MARRIAGE

CHAPTER I

JANE'S MATE

BEN STERLING does not come prominently upon the scene till shortly before Mrs. Mattock's death. But Jane had long been aware of him, and he still more of her. She was his senior by some years, and that circumstance had kept him a bachelor until her return to the place where sometimes as leader in games she had fought his battles against bigger boys. In childhood's alliance they had liked each other well; and Ben's was the brightest face to welcome her home again.

At twenty-one a very comely youth, he stood out noticeably among his fellows for strong physique and general favour. Had he not set eyes on Jane, there was at that time a wide choice waiting him, and jealousy in more than one heart when his mating instinct drew him from earlier flames to one whom angry rivals looked on as an outsider.

Ben's work lay on the land; farm-labour was the summing of his family history. The first of a large brood, he had been born in wedlock at rather short margin; and though in looks he did not take after his father, the latter accepted him as in the natural order of events; while by the number of children to whom she subsequently gave birth and early burial his mother achieved unquestioned respectability.

Coming first in those pauseless efforts of maternity he, the product perhaps of a better mating, had all the advantage of that fertile energy whose efficiency diminished with repetition. Where others wilted, he throve; and at cattle-

markets and country fairs stood out of the ruck, a fine figure of a man so long as he had legs to stand on.

He took his liquor well, with a homely pride in his ability to stand up glass for glass against any man of his own years: but neither then nor subsequently was he a sot, and only on fair-days claimed the common right to lie dead drunk in a ditch instead of returning home, and of that annual orgy was not ashamed.

His road to work took him daily past Jane's door, where her deft-handed industry gave him excuse to stop and watch. Before long it was known in the neighbourhood that 'Beauty Ben' had seen his match.

It was a gate courtship, slow and a little shy. Jane was seldom to be found alone, and for a while her superiority of years and the dry humour of her tongue held him to a distance. Though friendly of face she kept him—a little mischievously perhaps—in awe of her: content to hold at arm's length a problem she was not yet ready to solve—on what terms, namely, to give herself to one of those strange animals called men, of whose attraction she was abundantly aware; but whose moral standard—if in any way it existed adjustable to her own—she had yet to discover.

Mrs. Mattock, knowing well how short in rustic life is the season of courtship, and how when a cottage falls vacant the man wanting it must mate, was impatient lest her daughter should dally with her chances too late. She spoke urgently, but Jane was not to be moved.

"I don't want a man as can't wait," she said.

It was a partial admission that if he could wait long enough she would have him. Perhaps some word to this effect reached Ben himself. Remaining reticent but faithful he let a year go by, making no further advance save in the increasing frequency of his pauses by the way. And while he doted, in a devout simplicity, letting the rod of her discipline lie upon him for that waiting year, Jane in her body became aware of him, as once before of another in whom she had reposed neither so fair a trust nor so deep a liking. His patient attendance without bargain for reward

touched her not a little, for she understood the fret of man's desire when the eye is holding to the object of its hope. But what she had said she meant: it coloured her whole view of marriage—she would not have a man who could not wait.

Meanwhile her appropriation of 'Beauty Ben' had become a scandal to the neighbourhood. Interested parties condemned her in no measured terms, and the higher their indignation rose the further their estimate of her character went down.

"People are saying things about you," said Mrs. Mattock in tearful complaint; "and it's all your own fault."

Jane held up her head: incurious, she did not inquire what sort of things. "Let 'em elack," she said: "sparrers have always got something to say about other sparrers, when they can't get all the crumbs."

"You'll hear yourself named some day," she was told: and though there was a meaning in the phrase, she paid little attention to it at the time.

One fair-day—its second anniversary since her return to the neighbourhood—Jane went with others at the end of her day's work to the place of booths. Like the rest she paid her penny to see the fat man and the midgets, for these human things interested her; also at the boxing booth, which few women entered. For Jane loved a fight if it were done for sport; and as for the punishment it entailed, "Pain's good for 'em," she said. "Women have to bear more when they others don't think."

She went in with the special intent of seeing Ben take up the champion's challenge thrown out by the showman to the crowd; and was cried against for immodesty by those who remained behind. Ben, who had shied down two coco-nuts for her, was anxious that she should come. Willing enough she stood by, saw him strip to the job and acquit himself well. Native applause rang high; but the champion did not own himself beaten, nor did the showman who acted as judge give local talent all the points it had won.

More than the prowess he had shown, Jane approved the

equable temper in which Ben came out of that affair ; he had a right to be angry and was not. She went down with him to the brook and sponged his face ; and his looks were not spoiled for her (when once the bleeding of his nose had ceased) by the slight puffiness left over from the gloves.

Her humanness in caring to see a fight, and her interest in his share of it, emboldened him to ask, as she mopped his face, the question he had hitherto fought shy of. "Wilt have me, Jane?"

She put him off. "Go along with you!" she said. "I ain't having any one." And her air of easy indifference made him forbear at that time from pressing his suit further.

Nevertheless she bought him a blue tie in exchange for his coco-nuts, and feeling himself in her good grace he kept near her.

At fall of dusk he saw her homeward along a road trailed by others a good deal less sober than himself. It was then eight o'clock, and there was yet time for him to return and finish the day in the approved fashion.

On the outskirts of Shadbury they came upon a knot of roysterers drinking and dancing on the green of a wayside inn. Some of these were girls and their swains from Mutton village, and the late hour with its accompanying potations had begun to divide them according to temperament into the merry and the quarrelsome.

At the appearance of Ben in Jane's company, the merry set up a shout. Others struck in, their note less jovial : before long the quarrelsome was uppermost. With the curious jealousy of primitive communities for those who choose solitude, they resented her presence on this day of festival. For over two years, since her removal from the village, Jane had led a lonely life, seeing neighbours but seldom, and only leaving home for chapel or market or the disposal of her wares. Now, as if to make up for lost time, she became the butt of tongues : it was the gossips' chance.

"So she's got'n at last!" cried one, spitefully eyeing them as they drew near.

Laughter from the group followed ; then this from

another—"Ah, he won't be the first neither, not by a long way!"

Two couples unsteady of feet trailed out into the road. Wilfully obstructive to Jane's progress they lurched against her.

Ben recognizing acquaintances, as much the worse for drink as he might soon hope to be himself, took the matter good-humouredly. "Now Sue," he remarked to the most forward one, "you got your own fancy-man; you let we alone!"

This counsel coming from him of all men, raised angry feelings in the fair one's breast. "You try to let 'er alone!" she cried. "She won't let yer, my lad!" And addressing Jane in ribald tones, "Yer want it, don't yer?" she inquired.

The fancy-man, spurred on by Sue's gibes, sought to better them. "Ben, have yer been to bed with her yet?" This, in the usage of the day, was a comparatively civil interrogation. It did not sound so bald as it reads.

Allowing no time for reply, Sue struck in on the straight lead thus given; for though her rivalry in regard to Ben had passed beyond hope, her jealousy was still fierce.

To rustics in their wrath a Rabelaisian clarity of speech is at times given which cannot be coldly exposed to print.

In a few naked words Sue said her say, and smacked lip on it.

Jane smacked her face.

The smack, like all Jane's impulses, was terrific in character: her traducer went down like mown grass, and Jane, appalled at her own brutality, stood passive to the shaking which Sue's protector for the occasion proceeded to administer.

The next moment battle was joined on an issue as old as the crowing of cocks; but the fight was between a very ill-matched pair, and in less than a round Jane's man was getting far too much the best of it.

This was not to be borne. Angry wenches to right and left took pecks at the fray; they hung on him, hampered, buffeted, clawed down his arms, and with a second to aid—

for the other man did not long stand aloof—got him the worsting which they wished not so much for him as for Jane. In the midst of a beery ring too fuddled to cry fairness, Ben, fighting through obstructions whose hurt he sought to avoid, went down three times, and the last time, knocked out of sense, lay where he fell.

Contrary to her character (or to one side of it) Jane stood by without interference, and let her champion be beaten. White-faced she took her punishment, more grievous as it fell on a body not her own. But when the better man was down, taking his fill at last of the rest he had earned, Jane stepped across the ring. "If any one wants to fight now," she said, "it's me."

A little ashamed the men drew off, taking their wenches with them; their parting gibes fell on unheeding ears. Before long Ben showed proper signs of revival and sat up; Jane got him upon his feet. "Hold your head up, Ben," was all she said as she led him off the field: and very little passed between them till they reached Jane's door.

Ben took his beating without arguing about it, and made no claim. "They've give me six black eyes," was all he said when at last he looked at himself.

"There was four of 'em to do it," said Jane. She gave him no praise for his championship; yet he felt himself approved.

A fortnight later, when his face after its heavy battering had regained some of its comeliness, he returned modestly to the charge, his mind unaltered by the adversity into which she had tumbled him. And Jane, seeing herself still desirable to those blackened eyes, received him with kindness, humorously mingled with reproof. "What for," she asked him, "did you go mixing yourself in it? I didn't tell yer to."

"With him shaking the teeth out of your head, how could yer?"

"I could have bit him, if I'd a' wanted to."

"When I feels like fighting I don't ask leave o' nobody."

"All right, then," said Jane; "you pleased yourself."

"Well, I tried to."

Having done his best, Ben seemed so perfectly content to be beaten that it is little wonder her heart warmed to him. He had stood to a test and come out the better for it.

With her mind made up, it was not in Jane's way to be roundabout. Eye to eye they understood each other. "Thee can ask me again, Ben, if thee likes," she said, drawn by instinctive tenderness to the Quaker formula. And Ben took her at her word.

For the moment she gave him no direct answer; then, rejecting her mother's advice, "Ben," she said, "some of what they told about me was true—in a way; a deal more, like enough, than any of 'em could a' thought."

Ben's answer, though placid, came with something of a shock. "Aye," he said, "I know'd that—know'd it years ago."

"Know'd what?" Her tone was sharp. "Yes, you can say it!"

"Tom Deakin told me of it himself, when I was but a boy—made a boast of it. He told others too: that's how it got about."

This was stark news to Jane.

"What odds?" he went on. "There's plenty others one could name—aye, and some of them as was 'calling' yer, too—who haven't got nothing different to say for 'emselfes. It's a pretty common case, I reckon; and anyway, what is it but nature, as you may say?"

Thus he put the matter, making things easy for her to his own mind and hers: it was seldom that Ben committed himself to so many words.

"I'll tell you about it," she said then, "if you want to know."

"I've no call to know anything about it," he replied, looking away, awkward, a little abashed by her straight offer. "It's all over and past."

"Tom's dead," said Jane—"this long time. Did 'e know that?"

Ben shook his head. "No loss, I reckon. It was luck to get quit of him. He was an all-round bad lot, 'e was."

"No, he wasn't," said Jane, "but I shouldn't never have

married *him*. Yet there was times when I liked him well enough. Aye, and do still. He fathered my child for me, I've to remember that."

Ben gaped. This was news to him.

"You 'ad a child, 'ad yer?"

"Ah! D'yer mind?"

Ben's answer was delayed; he seemed not quite to know.

"Did it live?" he inquired then.

"Yes, and doing well."

"Where?"

"At a place Ossalbury way."

She eyed him expectant: hope sprung in her breast. But Ben's charity had its limitations.

"That's all right, then," he remarked, easing off.

"D'you ever go to see 'im?"

"I've seen him once a year for the last five," said Jane, her throat stiffening. "It's all I could do. When I came back I wanted to have him 'ere; but Mother said it 'ud break 'er 'eart for people to know, so I left it."

"Aye," he said slowly. "It's a pity: but there it is."

He spoke as though the matter having been settled, there was no more to say, paused, then asked: "Well, be yer going to marry me?"

Jane weighed him for a while; but her eye had not ceased to be friendly. "Yes, if you'll respect me, Ben, I'll marry yer," she said at last.

"Respect yer? What for no?"

It was hard to find the word. Her mind was on things still bitter to look back upon. Hitherto in her experience men had not, where that matter was concerned, shown respect; the two principles, male desire and woman's freedom, had seemed divorced; if that went on, marriage might be the heavier bond.

"I'd let you know," she said, measuring her words, "I can't live with you unless you respect me."

Saying this she came near and put hands on him, standing there for the first time very close, so that they felt each other's warmth. If this were a last test, Ben stood the strain.

"I haven't once kissed yer, Jen, not without asking, have I?" he inquired.

That seemed good answer enough. She leaned to him with a smile. "You may kiss me, Ben," she said, "if you like," adding as he did so, with a faint quaver of voice: "You'll be decent to me always, always—won't yer? There's that I can't stand."

It was the cry of a life that had known a wound slow to heal. But at that moment her heart was great over the measure of proof which seemed now to promise a new felicity. So having proved him, she let herself be wooed to the life he offered her; and it seemed then like enough that she would settle down for the rest of her days to the breeding and rearing of the unrestricted family out of which in those 'hungry forties' England was building up her huge problem of poverty versus wealth.

This frugal pair had no need to make distant plans; as matters stood the household question was simple, Jane and her mother could not be parted, the furnished house was there; her own small trade gave additional prospects, and they planned to marry in a month.

But Mrs. Mattock, without at all willing it, disposed matters otherwise. In all her life the few things she had done decidedly had been to the misdirection or hindrance of her daughter's career; and now she became so decidedly worse in health that Jane postponed all thought of marriage and its attendant cares, giving herself up to the undivided fulfilment of a duty which henceforth took all her time.

Even so Ben had not to wait many months: in the winter Mrs. Mattock died, and dressed in the resurrection shroud which she had made for herself thirty years ago, was laid by her husband's side under the old yew-tree in the chapel graveyard.

Jane scandalized public opinion by marrying before two months were over, considering that she had kept Ben waiting quite long enough already. On the first occasion when he came to see her in her new loneliness she bade him put up the banns. He did not need twice telling; the

accepted lover was ardent for the day of pairing, and, though submitting to the restraints imposed on his solitary courtship, was, so far as he could carry it in words, a demonstrative wooer. Perhaps because in those days of probation she still schooled him, he was the more impelled to find outlet for his ardour in speech, which under the limits of his rustic vocabulary took quaint forms. Sitting by Jane's side and watching her as she worked with an industry which seemed to remove him from her thoughts, male jealousy at delay sometimes got hold of him. "I love 'e, I love 'e eruel!" he exclaimed one day. "I love 'e like the 'orses. I could bite thy little ear off!" He spoke as he had seen, of the loves of strong stallions for their mares, matching the crude force of his passion to that which in his own experience was the biggest thing of its kind. And Jane was not offended by it. God having so made man, she accepted him.

They married into the small cottage by the osier-beds where she had lived for the past three years; but at the June quarter moved to another which had fallen vacant nearer the village, nearer also to Ben's work, and within a stone's throw of neighbours' doors. Here Jane, reinstated and accepted in her small world, became social again. She recovered old habits and old friends, and found much to like in them; for past association gave values to the independence of mind she had now acquired. She went regularly to chapel, partly for Ben's sake; for though he was never one to testify it encouraged him to clean himself. In those days labourers went to worship in their clean smocks and (if they possessed it) a beaver hat passed down in the family from father to son. As Ben's father was still alive, Jane gave him one that had belonged to her Uncle Jim. He looked noble in it—to the eyes of his own day, though it may seem laughable now.

Thus in their early married life Jane resumed some of the conventions which she found lying around; and being told by her mother-in-law that it was her wifely duty, offered to make Ben his resurrection robe against the day when he should be needing it. "Though for myself," she

remarked, "I'd like you better in your smock." Ben had the sense to agree ; so a smock it was. She made him a very fine one.

"Will you be wearing your hat, too ? " she inquired. He was something of a babe to her still in those early days ; for there was much motherhood in her heart, unsatisfied of its claims.

Nevertheless she was happy. Ben respected her ; and she found marriage wonderful.

CHAPTER II

SHEAVES OF HARVEST

THE affliction of being wedded to an exemplary husband was not to be Jane's. Providence saw to it, then and always, that those who needed no physician should come but seldom under her wing. Virtue alone did not attract her, she liked it mixed. To her the Kingdom of Heaven was like a grain of mustard-seed lost in a bundle of hay, or like a pearl in a pig-trough, or like corn-seed fallen by the wayside for the fowls of the air to devour; and the adventure of discovering and holding it safe without being unduly hard on bundle of hay, or pig, or hungry bird, were salt and flavour of life to her. "Pigs are the finest cattle as is," she once remarked, when helping to clean out a neighbour's sty which had become an offence to her nostrils. She seemed to regard the amount of dirt they produced as a special proof of the richness of their natures, and conveyed it to the land with thanksgiving to the Lord, who, in making man and beast, had not forgotten to make manure also.

The attraction was mutual; pigs liked her, and stood up to her at the doors of their pens as she passed by. "I can't kiss yer, ye've too much lip, but I'll scratch your back for yer," she said to one of these. And when Ben was trough-like in his ways she meted out to him a similar dispensation of her favour.

In those days the standard of sobriety in rural districts could not be called either low or high; it was non-existent. For Ben, because of his good humour and pleasing disposition, it was perhaps a little further removed from existence than for others. Most of his neighbours liked him well;

and they liked him better drunk, because then he was more fun. Beer did not make him quarrelsome as it did others, rather the reverse ; it made him talkative abroad, and conjugal at home. And it was in regard to this phenomenon of his nature that Jane treated him as she did her friend the pig—not kissing him, but scratching his back for him, though never vindictively ; for custom, training, and common sense had taught her to regard drink as a very forgivable and natural failing in the otherwise uncomforted lives of working men. Still she drew the line : if he took comfort in that direction, he was not at the same time to expect comfort from her.

Perhaps Ben was a little puzzled as to why the only two indulgences within a poor man's reach should be thus sundered for him, instead of combined ; but he had her word for it that in certain ways she liked him less when he was merry than when sober. Having stated her preference she did not nag about it.

Now and again she would launch a dart at him, for her tongue had that quality ; and Ben, recognizing that she had wits superior to his own, would waggle at her foolishly in a vague wonder and respect, and boast thereafter that his wife had 'talked powerful' to him !

And Jane admired him still. "It's wonderful how you manage to keep your legs," she said. "Pity it should all go to your 'ead ; but if you was to put your feet in it, pig-like, you'd never get 'ome."

"I'd walk 'ome to you on my 'ead," said Ben, amorous even to her rebuffs of him.

"Oh, would yer ? And before yer knowed you'd get planted in a hole, and grow up into a hop. But I don't need to see you standing on your 'ead to know whether you've had too much. When you come in of a night, if you're in your senses it's just 'Hallo, Jen !' and that's enough. If you're out of 'em, it's 'Allo, little girl, you there ?' And I like my own name best."

But though she told him of it, Ben was too simple to avoid the tell-tale habit. "What odds ? You'd find me out anyway," he was shrewd enough to observe.

“ I would that,” said Jane ; “ by the smell on yer.”

Thus she told what she thought of him. They never quarrelled, and often enough Ben would repeat elsewhere, with a sort of pride, the things she had said to him ; and word of it would be passed then to others. They named her for a shrew, yet it seemed that her shrewishness suited him ; and even when he knew himself to be drunk, home-going though sobering in its effect had no terrors for him.

Had Ben drunk on his own earnings alone, Jane could have had him sober in a week and kept him so for ever after. But to stand and be stood treat in turn confounds in simple hearts the teachings of domestic morality, and for that very reason has become a national institution. Having paid for but one drink for himself and stood treat to seven others, Ben with eight drinks to the good could still feel that he had fulfilled the law of temperance ; for even as a sparrow cannot count its own eggs beyond two, neither can your boon companion take account of the drinks he has not paid for. You may impose temperance as an act of war, and prohibit treating by Act of Parliament, yet you shall not make understood an arithmetic which is opposed to the brewer's interest and the honour among thieves who are out to rob wives of their wages by a device so quieting to the male conscience.

On that device Ben's drinking habits throve, seeming to be all one with his love of human fellowship ; and there were in consequence few week-ends when Jane's pride in him had not to confine itself to his management of his legs. On each fresh occasion Ben came back to her unabashed, short of memory as to the qualified welcome which awaited him ; and having sometimes to be taught his lesson over again.

For that reason Jane, accommodating herself to his ways, chose on Saturday nights to sit up late mending his clothes ; and having got him decently to bed would possess her soul in patience for the next hour, contemplating, under the figure of worn raiment, the large yet still reparable holes which habit made in him.

Outward appearances (over which at times she mildly

sorrowed) thus presented a hopeful parable of spiritual changes to which he might yet attain; for Saturday settings did nothing to dim the glory of his Sunday risings. It seemed as though with his week's beard he shaved off all the effects of his potations of the night before, and in his clean smock and his beaver hat stood forth, like one of those risen bodies which, as St. Paul assures the fool, cannot be quickened except it die. Being of the earth so earthy during the week, vigorous and strong to labour, Ben was able to imbibe, without much permanent harm, more liquor than the virtue of any of my present readers could stand; and had Jane troubled herself about it more she would not have done him a bit of good.

Whether material so unequally matched would have worn well together for a long period fate had not to decide; but in this their early prime the two suited each other, and that in spite of an unlooked-for delay in the fulfilment of their legitimate hopes. They had been married for over three years before Jane was able to make announcement of that prospective increase which usually attends on wedded bliss.

It was then early summer, the time of blossoming tree and buttercup; and at Nature's yield of a favour so long delayed, Ben was proportionately the better pleased, and very proud both of himself and her. He went off to sound the news where it was sure of a boisterous welcome, and thereafter a quick circulation; and three hours later by the kindness of his pot-companions he came home rather more drunk than usual, and this not Saturday night. He was also rather more demanding—as some, under the circumstances, might think pardonable, and Jane being tired had gone to bed.

It was over what then ensued that Ben got from her an astonishing bit of news which almost shocked him to soberness again. Measuring him with a stern eye—"You let me alone, Ben," she said. "'Twas because Tom wouldn't, as I killed 'un. I didn't rightly know why at the time, but I do now; and you've got to know it too."

It may be doubted whether Ben ever really believed

her statement ; but he accepted the fact. Jane, in self-defence, was as terrific as the female spider when once its mating is accomplished : had he embraced her then, she would have eaten him.

This was no temporary inhibition such as he had come up against before. From this time on, she belonged to herself and her child, not to him ; and the full meaning of nature's law and Jane's matrimonial code was slowly brought home to him.

He stood the test as he had stood those others with which she had tried him ; and also, as then, made no boast of it. For a while he even abated his weekly carousings, and lost—whether as a consequence or no—some of that robustness of health which ordinarily characterized him. Neighbours pointed him out as example of a phenomenon less usual among the rich than the poor—one of those husbands, namely, who mysteriously share the physical tribulations of their wives. It was credibly reported of him that, at a time when Jane by rights should have been the sufferer, he took it upon himself at regular intervals to be 'sick as a horse' when the hour came for rising ; and as a consequence was less efficient in the field, at the very time when energy was most required of him.

Harvest was then being brought in, rather late under a delay of rains ; and for the same reason the men worked at high pressure during a fine spell which did not promise to last. Perhaps because his bodily condition was not then all that it should have been to meet the strain Ben fell back on unabstemious ways ; and on the last day's harvesting, as the wagons raced home under a darkening heaven, took reckless aid of the unlimited flow of cider sent down to the workers from the farm.

Jane was among the gleaners, and as she rose from stooping saw for the last time Ben's form bright and brown standing high on a piled wagon against the imbrued background of coming storm. She looked at him with contentment in her heart, stooped again to her work, heard a rattle of harness, then a cry. At the flick of a boy's whip the horses had started before the word ; on

the forward jolt of the wagon Ben pitched to earth, and the big wheel went over him.

The thing was done, eyes needed no second telling of that final event. Jane lay down, took her dead man in her arms, and would not let go : and it was two, not one, that the improvised party of bearers carried back from the field to Jane's home.

Six days later, alongside of the grave occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Mattock, a hole was dug for Ben in a space wide enough for Jane also to share when her own life's pilgrimage should be ended.

The body lay on trestles by the porch, with the door left open, when the congregation passed in to pray. It was a great event. In those days sudden deaths were looked on not as a mercy but as a judgment ; and though many in that assembly had liked Ben well, they had grave doubts as to what must have now befallen him. In that respect preaching and prayer could not alter facts, but for those of careless life the solemn example remained ; also there were the mourners to be consoled, and for the sake of survivors even a corpse doubtful of bliss has to be treated respectfully.

Caleb Gronning, who had no legs left to him, was carried in to do the praying over one now relegated to the past, whose legs, at a crucial moment for cause well understood, had failed him. He with other elders sat on the platform, Jane before the rest of the congregation just below, with Ben's relatives to right and left of her ; for though the purity of her primitive faith had long been suspect, and though the community had other and more recent things against her, that place of honour as her due could not, on such an occasion as this, be denied.

Nevertheless it was known that she had not expressed that faith in the resurrection, whether for bliss or bane, which the Brotherhood's ritual prescribed : she had even flouted it. Ben lay in his coffin not in the resurrection robe which should have been his covering, but in a clean smock which his wife had washed and ironed for him : and thus, unashamed, she had let him be seen by those

who had come to look in on him for the last time. This symbolic committal of his body to earth, as a thing not to rise again, could not be approved: his family had remonstrated. "Well, it's to be hoped he's gone to glory," a neighbour dubiously remarked; adding by way of reproof on that strange choice of garb, "Leastways he don't have to labour any more. And his sorrows and his sighings have all fled away now—please God."

But Jane would accept no portrait of him that was not true.

"He was never a great one for sighing," she replied, "nor sorrowing either. He ate 'earty the last meal he had at home; and when he went out, 'It's going to rain,' he said. But it didn't never rain again while 'e was alive. When they brought him back dead there was sweat on his face still. Aye, he'd worked, and he'd got all his life and powers up to the last."

"Yes, it was terrible sudden," commented her hearer.

"It was sudden," said Jane. "Pity he won't never see his own child: that 'ud a' made him proud."

"Ah, it isn't pride he's got to think of now!" said the other in tone of correction. Jane's mentality was all wrong: she would not take the right view of death. She did not even wear widow's weeds, only the old black in which three years ago she had followed her mother to the grave. Thus, in choice of garb for herself and him, she humbled her man to the dust. It was not considered respectable. And there in its coffin outside the body waited, while Caleb took up his parable and prayed.

The prayer was long; it was full of gloom, of misery, and of the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched; of sin and the sting of death; of deliverance also, and of abounding grace; but these things uttered in so quavering a voice that they brought no cheer, where cheer was not intended to be. The day of resurrection—a day of joy for some, of doom for others—was touched with a special emphasis. Then the stones in the chapel yard would lift, and the mounded earth heave, and the dead come forth, glistening and white, arrayed in the marriage garment of the Lamb. It was that doctrine of

physical identity, dear to Primitive hearts, which Jane by her action had seemed to deny. Ben's mother heard it with great satisfaction, and hoped that her widowed daughter-in-law would profit by it and know now what people thought of her. Just now she and Jane (by her own choice) were hardly on speaking terms, for which reason she sat farthest away in the row, and not by Jane's side where her place should have been. Sidling she turned her head to see how Jane was taking it.

Jane was not taking it at all: she did not hear. That curious combination of outward and inward vision to which she was ever liable had carried her attention elsewhere. On the bald head of an elder bowed prayerfully in front of her, two flies were pairing. Life went on, and the world continued to enjoy itself, though her man was dead.

Her thoughts were of him, of the days and nights they had spent together, the simple intimacy of habit and speech which had joined their lives, the sense of him out in the fields while she herself toiled in the home, the waiting for his return, the mutual need and liking they had of each other, the wonderful fact that though they had words they had never quarrelled, and the fact, more wonderful still for abundant thanksgiving, that through him, simple and honest though frail, sex had become for her a clean thing, and her life no longer separated a vessel of wrath from the lives and the human nature of men. She thought of when first she began to know him well, in the boxing booth on fair-day, and afterwards by the brook, and afterwards again, a figure of defeat, lying battered and bruised for having championed her name. That brought her back to the other sight, so recent—a sight which for all its fatality made less show of blood—of him lying dead where the wheel of the wagon had gone over him: caught in the folds of his smock hung ears of corn. "I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord." In her body she bore well planted the life which her dead man had given her—and knew that, in mothering this, she mothered him also. She made that her prayer.

Caleb's voice had ceased; she became aware of a shuffling

of feet as the congregation made ready to pass out into the graveyard.

Eyes turned to the mourner's bench. Expecting a move to the doors where the bearers now stood waiting, they saw instead the widow rise in her place and stand to speak; and with the horrific sense that there was no stopping her—for truly the occasion was hers—they heard her pronounce her husband's name, who hitherto in all this service to his memory had stayed nameless.

"I would have all of you to know," she said, "that he was a good man, though he died drunk. He was a child in his heart, and never did he will mischief, or to do any man wrong. There were times when he spent money as he didn't ought, but it wasn't only on himself; and it wasn't on his own money he got drunk when others tempted him. I'd have you know, too, he was a man of clean mind; he'd nothing against him there, as some have who think better of 'emselves. He never passed a child in trouble but he spoke to cheer it; he never cheated his neighbour, nor told lies to do harm to others. He loved God better than he loved chapel or preachments and prayings; and them as come to their end with no more evil in their hearts may have good hope of the abounding mercy that be about us all. I've come to say this for him, because there's nobody knows to say it so well as I. And I thank God as give him to me to care for; and I thank Him that we had faithful love one to the other, and no bitterness in our hearts; and I thank Him for giving him a quick death and no pain."

Then she sat down.

The scandal of a woman speaking where Paul predicated silence was over—had been accomplished, that is to say. In any other sense it was not over but begun. The congregation breathed hard, unable to buzz as it wished. "Brethren," said Caleb, ignoring the indecorum he had been powerless to prevent, "let us now take our brother's body to the grave."

And they took Ben's body to the grave and buried him; and when all was done their tongues were loosed, and they spoke plainly about Jane things which she did not stay to hear.

CHAPTER III

JANE'S EWE LAMB

THE afflictions of the human race are of two main kinds, the earned and the unearned, those for which by our own conduct we are responsible, and those which come upon us from a natural order of events outside our control.

Jane had already learned much in that school of spiritual economy which teaches us not to rail at 'Providence,' and as there had been no bitterness over the drawbacks of her life with Ben, neither was there any bitterness in her grief.

But in another direction her spirit troubled her, and was ill at ease. It was an affair of long standing, dating from her return home. She was troubled about her boy. Not that she had any direct reason to think that his welfare was not cared for; but her own part in it had become increasingly small.

Only once, in the short interval between her mother's death and her marriage, had she been to see him. He had grown almost out of recognition, they had become as strangers, for the first time he was shy of her. A fear lest in the future, when her chance for seeing him might be less, there should follow a wider breach in their once instinctive relations, caused her to demand of the authorities a modification of the terms on which he was withheld from her. He must be told that she was his mother. She let it be seen that she knew what ground she stood on. "I know I could have him back if I liked," she said: "there ain't no law." But she had a scruple over breaking the bargain unless she could repay the cost. And of course that was impossible.

She had her way ; and the results a little disappointed her. "Mother" was only a word, and to Jim meant very little indeed ; he liked her as he found her, not otherwise. Jane stayed for three days, and they became friends : he was a strong ruddy urchin, rather unruly to authority, pugnacious, and fond of games, also of breaking bounds.

Jane did not think the worse of him for any of these things, but she gave him sage counsel, also a small dole of pocket-money which she could ill spare, and which probably undid the moderating effects of her advice to him. He seemed puzzled when she told him of her prospective change of name and condition. It seemed to be an unmothering of him following too quick on the previous announcement. His own name was Mattock, so much he knew : any further ideas of his origin had probably been on the lines of that youthful embryologist who, brought up without ostensible parents, defined himself to inquirers as "an accident what had happened to his aunt." The orphanage contained a good many of them, and though talk of it was forbidden the probability was that they knew. Hitherto Jane had been a kind of an aunt to him ; now that in the course of a passing visit she became his mother, it did not seem to make much difference.

Jane walked the forty miles home again, as she had come. It took her a day and a half ; she had been absent a week. After that she and Jim corresponded, to the extent of a letter once a year, but she had not again seen him, the distance was too great, and post-travelling beyond her means.

Ben's death set her thoughts free again in her boy's direction, but to walk was not then within her powers. She wrote asking for news of him, and fretted that she got no answer. Then an event supervened, and for a while she forgot to think about him.

Awaiting that she had stayed on in the cottage where Ben had planted her. It stood a stone's throw away from others, off the road ; and conveniently near, across a strip of field, a small stream ran down to the osier-beds, which a mile farther on filled the marshier levels lying toward Shadbury.

There she resumed, as a trade, the basket-making which for local need she had never quite discontinued, dug her own patch, and washed for the family she and her mother had served of old.

Toward the end of December a girl child was born to her, and if ever a mother's heart crowed with exultation and pride, Jane's did so then. Maternity that had not to be concealed under a bushel was an astonishingly new thing to her; for this was a social, and not a clandestine event: mothers came to rejoice with her, neighbours were more neighbourly, children tip-toed to see, and giggled with sweet foolishness over each small sign of life which exuded from the sleeping babe. Even the next door neighbour's dog, fresh from an affair of her own (out of which only one had survived) seemed interested. Jane saw a primrose way of motherhood opening before her: she had joy, and health, and strength, and the Lord had been good to her.

Little Eliza, named after Jane's mother, became a curiously wise child—wise in her abounding contentment in any position wherein she found herself. Placed by the overruling hands in which she trusted whether to sit or lie, she would wait for life to fulfil itself with a pleased interest; and wherever left would be found—after quite long intervals—building with her mind's eye castles of contentment in the openings her small world afforded her. Even the passionate weepings of her teething-time she seemed to apologize for, and got into mischief with intentions so obviously laudable—to investigate, namely, the beautiful nature of things—that reproof became difficult. She would be seen quite deliberately and softly to upset a jug, and assist its spoiled contents toward the floor with gentle pushings and loud cries of 'look! look!'—merely to see how water flowed and how milk did likewise.

As she grew older her faculty for self-amusement developed. She would come and stand by the door within which her mother sat working, pick up from her lips some exchange of phrase, and go off repeating it, spreading it abroad to the world so that it might live.

"Are you a happy child?" Jane heard her inquire

of the flowers, weeds, and pebbles she encountered in her path after one of these brief interviews: or, at another time, addressing herself to cats, dogs, poultry, and all creeping things—"Don't you go too far, dearie!" she would say; "mind you don't go too far!"

When she had not these to converse with, she talked much to herself; and plainly had a world of her own.

With the young dog, Peter, her near contemporary by birth but so much the faster in growth, little Eliza had made close friends, and from the next cottage which was his home, he would come daily seeking a playmate when older children were at school. Outside the door he would stand and bark for her, and Lizzie, hearing his voice and running forth in haste, "Peter, Peter!" would cry.

Sometimes, in the delight of first meeting, he would leap and tumble her, but she did not seem to mind any more than a sand-urchin minds being tumbled by a wave; and Peter would stand waggishly by, wait till she had got up and tumble her again.

One morning, Jane started work early, having an order to finish for delivery against time. The early autumn sun was still low, there was a touch of sharpness in the air, and the tinkle of the stream below its grassy banks sounded pleasant and brisk. Sitting on a low stool inside the porch she could see down the strip of garden where Lizzie played; and though apart they were still in touch.

Lizzie toddled up the path, bearing a dead bee in a dahlia-cup; "As'cep," she said, and went off again. Before long Peter came to fetch her for purposes of his own, bringing a stick. He dropped it invitingly before her; the child took it up and swung it away. 'Yap, yap!' stick and dog flew off together.

The two playfellows passed out of view.

Jane heard the child's voice from round the corner, "Come here, Peter! Peter! Give it to me, Peter!" then, farther away, the 'yap, yap!' of the dog's voice challenging her. She could picture it all without seeing,—the dog's provocative flight, the child's pursuit: of the two, the animal playing the more masterful game.

Again, and now farther away, she heard the quick yapping of the dog, and the child's cry, startled but not uncheerful. That was a tumble : the thought went lightly through her mind—also that they had gone beyond bounds : Peter when he entered must have pushed open the gate. Leaning out, she threw a call, "You come back, Lizzie! Come back into the garden!"

The excited barking of the dog cut in, the sound of his feet across the grass, then a soft happy yammering as he chobbled the stick.

A few minutes later, the child not having reappeared, "Lizzie!" she called again, and was getting up to leave her work when she heard a running of small feet on the path, and the panting voice of a neighbour's child crying, "Missus, our dog's pushed your Lizzie into the water!"

Jane ran out. Lizzie was not to be seen : but as she raced across the narrow strip of green dividing her garden from the brook, the mother saw and remembered afterwards the dog rolling delightedly on the grass with the stick now all his own.

Between the edges of bank, so narrow from side to side, she saw the soles of a pair of small shoes sticking up motionless : down below in less than a foot of water lay all that mattered. The baby garments had slipped streamward, and there lay drenched, leaving limbs and body bare. To the lifting hands they made the load seem heavier : the weight of it struck like a blow.

The small boy, who had kept her company, said pantingly, "I was up on field at our back : I see 'un do it! He jump up, and got stick off 'er, and run off with it. And when I saw as her didn't get up, I come along—quick, I did—to tell you of it."

Jane, hearing and seeing and understanding all, had no words to spare then. One thought of horror oppressed her—how, after hearing the child's cry, she had waited, waited for her to return, waited because the gay barking of the dog had so instantly reassured her.

As she carried her small burden home, conscious that the boy still accompanied her, she bade him fetch his mother :

and for the next few minutes was with the child alone. She stripped off the wet clothes, wrapped it in a blanket and gave it warmth : but beyond that she knew little what to do. She had heard tell that the drowned were not really and irrevocably dead, that in the very worst cases prolonged effort might bring them back to life. But she did not know the way of it, or only vaguely ; nor, when neighbours arrived, had they any better help to offer. "I know," said Jane, "I know as one puts the head lower than the rest : but how does one do then ?"

They did by a sort of dim instinct something that resembled what should have been done ; and the little body took with a mechanical indifference all the care they lavished on it, but gave no rewarding sign in return. Others came to look on and lend aid ; but there was no thought of sending for a doctor : the distance was too great for it to be of any use. So they toiled till the day was well advanced ; clouds came with a sharp fall of rain and passed away, and the sun took back the world into its keeping once more, but nothing came to give hope.

With a loud metallic burr the kitchen clock struck ten. Jane raised herself and spoke as one having authority. "Stop," she said ; "it ain't no use : 'er's dead."

"Oh, you can't be sure !" quavered one of the women pitifully, wishing to stave off the blow.

"My 'eart tells me," said Jane. "I know. 'Er wasn't quite dead when I 'ad 'er first : but 'er is now. 'See !"

The women looked on with awe while the mother demonstrated ; and they had to admit that it was death.

"I suppose," said Jane then, speaking slow, "a doctor'll have to see 'er."

"There'll be the coroner too," remarked one of the women.

"Ah !" Jane let go a breath : her hands rested on the body for a while. Then she rose to her feet.

They watched her wrap the body in soft folds, and put on a shawl. "I'm going to take 'er to the doctor," she said ; "it's the best way." She went out.

"Poor soul, she haven't put on her bonnet !" said one as they watched her go.

Jane went by a mile of field skirting the brook, till she came out into the Shadbury road by the osier-beds. Even when she had quitted the field-path her course was solitary and undisturbed ; at that time of the day the road bore little traffic, she met nobody she knew.

Walking at a great pace with eyes straight ahead, she was hardly conscious of what passed, though still aware of the way her feet were taking her.

A mile out of Shadbury she came to the hill which there rises solitary. Down the slope to meet her rolled a wagon drawn by a team of horses ; overhead the high load swayed and trembled, and the bright harness jingled as it swung ; the wagoner walked beside, letting his beasts go their own way.

As they encountered he gave Jane a friendly nod. " Fine day, missus," he said, and passed.

Jane made no answer, she did not look at him ; up the hill she pushed with unslackened pace ; then, as she went, became gradually aware that some one had spoken to her. What was it that he had said ?

She came to the crest, and stopped. The word had come back to her. A fine day : it was a fine day, he had said. Ahead and to right and left under her feet stretched level plain ; the sun was at her back, it was morning still. So she stood and looked at the world and the heaven that lay over it : she looked and her eyes drank. From east to west day hurried to its end, and in all that great washed expanse was nothing that did not respond. Strong courses of cloud ran endless, shadows slid under them, motion and light went everywhere in ribands and pools, broke, parted, and joined again, wavering, tremulous, clear to earth's farthest bourne. Through shine and shade alike went the ruffle of wind, tintings of gold shook amid bowers of green, leaves turned glittering and wet, whitening boughs opened and closed again ; birds eager and swift tossed to the wind, battled and found their way ; and in all the tumult and murmur of this breathing life no single and separate sound reached her ears. She must take it, all or none, as God had made it : impartial and perfect to the blessings that lay around.

For the first time then she looked down to the burden she bore. Under the fold of the shawl amid soft wrappings a little cluster of fair hair escaped to catch the light. Warmth had dried it again, its flossy texture had come back to it; this way and that it curled and twisted, lifting in light tendrils; the wind came and caught it with its breath and blew it like mist: warm and soft as gossamer it touched Jane's face.

She readjusted the shawl, gave a fresh heft to her load, the very weight of which was dear to her, and went on her way.

The Shadbury doctor was startled and almost shocked, when Jane, without previous word, disclosed before his eyes the naked body of her child.

"Three years ago you helped me to bring this into the world," she said. "Now 'er's drowned. Tell me what I'm to do."

At nightfall she was back again, sitting solitary in the lonely home. All duty done, she had now only to wait. Neighbours in her absence had arranged the house, and dried and folded the small garments: she took them in her lap and sat down in the porch, in the very spot where she and the child had met and spoken last. It was there Lizzie had brought her the dead bee in the dahlia-cup;—'asleep,' she had said.

Jane stooped, searched till she had found, sat holding it, and wondered why it should have become a precious thing. Her thoughts were rapt far away, and for a while she lost all sense of what lay outside.

The sound of one claiming attention drew her back again. It was the dog Peter: he looked at her interrogatively, as though waiting invitation. Jane said nothing; he went into the house, looked round, and came out again. With an animal's sense that all was not well, he touched her skirt with his paw, and asked again.

Jane reached out her hands, took his head, drew it to her knee, and sat holding it. Over him her face bowed low, her lips quivered, and for the first time her eyes found help in tears. She wept and was glad, for now God had given her proof: and there was no hate in her heart for anything in the world that He had made.

CHAPTER IV

PUBLICANS AND SINNERS

FIVE days later Jane buried Lizzie in her father's grave ; and about the same hour quitted home for a tramp over forty miles. Desire and duty drew her. Solitude had made her a free woman, and now that he was the only one left, the hunger she felt for her first-born could no longer be stayed.

Her anxiety about him was of long standing ; for Jim did not write, though she now knew where he was. His present whereabouts had been discovered to her in an unfortunate way. She had gone within a year of Lizzie's birth hoping to see him : unable to be absent from the babe more than a couple of days had saved money and travelled by coach. Arriving, she found that he had been transferred to another branch of the Home farther away, where older boys were taught a trade ; and the authorities had not told her ! It lay on the farther side of Ossabury, away from Yalemouth, and the distance thereto was not far : but money and time were spent, the authorities offered no aid, and she came home without seeing him.

She was aware then that her visits were no longer favoured ; having reasserted her parentage, she was looked upon as dangerous ; for it was not unusual for mothers to reclaim their sons as they got to profitable years. In Jim's case there was also his religion to be safeguarded.

The Principal told her that he had become a troublesome character, and in his eye she read a charge as to its probable origin. Jim had in consequence been placed with older boys rather before his time, being then twelve years old. This, two years ago, was the last she had heard of him.

She arrived at the Home on the afternoon of the second day. This time a greater blow awaited her. In the previous week, Jim and two older boys had run away, and had not been recaptured. They had been traced to Yale-mouth. One of them, not Jim, had shipped on a North Sea trading vessel; of the other two nothing was known.

Jane tramped home heavy of heart; and for the time, at least, her spirit was utterly broken. Once more she had gone to do life-service and had come too late. It was on Friday that she learned the news. Early on the following Sunday she drew near to her own village: and coming by way of the house for which she and her mother had laundried in the past, she took the short cut through the wood. She crossed the little brook where she had once gathered stones, passed the spot where Caleb Gronning had called her to ways of grace, and came presently to 'Dead Man's Hole.' Here she halted and looked. Around its mouth the thicket had grown very dense: nobody who did not know could see the cavern lying within, nor even the rail that guarded it. Its secret was very safe from the eyes of men. A few yards farther on she came to the place of killing. There also things had grown; over the once mossy space nut-bushes thrust their boughs, and the ground had become bare. But the tree where Tom had leaned waiting for her she could still recognize. As she looked at it, her eyes just at their own level encountered the initials "T.D." cut deeply in the rind. Inscribed all these years she had never seen them till now. Alongside more faintly traced were the beginnings of a "J" and an "M": weather-stained and scarred, they came to her from the dead hand like a thing of yesterday. She quickened her pace and passed on; but her energies were spent, and before she had gone many steps she flagged again. She was very footsore and walked lame.

As she drew near the chapel she heard the voice of prayer; meeting had already begun. She turned in, entered, and sat down on the nearest bench glad to find rest. A few heads turned and looked at her in surprise: here, they said to themselves, was the talking woman come back again. Since the birth of her child, being single-handed in the

house, she had attended chapel but seldom ; and many had begun to think that she had left the community. When she brought her child to burial there had been no service except a prayer at the grave, for to one of such tender age church-membership was unattainable, and the uncovenanted mercies were all that Primitive Brotherhood could predicate.

But though in some sort Jane had become a stranger in their midst, in no other place could she meet so many faces that she knew, or lives so long and closely linked with her own history. This, in spite of all drawbacks and limitations, was more entirely her own world than any other : she knew the backs of their heads, their voices, even when they only coughed, their ways of conforming to worship, their ways of nonconformity when worship was over, their characters, tempers, the members of their families, their tribulations and trials, their compensations and joys. If she was not part of these, then she was alone in the world.

She sat with sunk head and folded hands, taking no share in what went on, too weary and dispirited either to rise or kneel. Her mind was obsessed by the thing she had so strangely seen that day for the first time, the two pairs of initials cut by the dead hand, done as likely as not only a few minutes before he died. It seemed to come as a message to her, a proof that he was not as dead as she had thought.

All the time that the presiding elder preached she was away with her own thoughts hearing nothing : she did not even know that confession of sin had been his theme ; but when a pause came that others might give their testimony she rose and spoke.

At the sound of the talking woman's voice all turned : here was scandal again. But the heavy affliction that had fallen upon her was known, and it was only gently that the presiding elder lifted a silencing hand.

Jane said, " There's an unburied body lying in ' Dead Man's Hole,' as can't rest. ' E's took all I had, because it was through me he died. I ask you to give him Christian burial so as he may have rest in the grave."

She finished : there was a strange pause. Everybody looked at her, nobody spoke. She sat down, and no one else rose to testify. The minister said, "Brethren, we will sing a hymn."

The hymn was sung, a final prayer followed, and the service was over. Everybody looked at Jane as they went out, and all the way while she walked home she was a spectacle for eyes. But nobody spoke to her then ; nor did any believe what she had said.

That evening one of her neighbours came to her, a little in fear, sent by others to inquire into the state of her mind. "Jane Sterling," she said, "was that true what you told us in chapel to-day ?"

By that time the obsession of superstitious dread which had been upon her had passed and Jane's soul was her own.

"No," she said, "it wasn't true. 'Twas a lie."

"However did you come to say it ?" the other remonstrated.

"The Devil tempted me. I doubted of God's mercy and love, and I said what I thought I 'ad to say."

"You 'adn't ought to have spoke at all," said the woman.

"No," assented Jane.

"Being a woman, I mean."

To that Jane was silent.

"It's no use numbering the dead," she said. "It's the living we must count."

"She's thinking of all them she's lost," the woman reported on returning to those who had sent her. It seemed understandable enough.

So little was Jane believed by any who heard that none troubled to look in 'Dead Man's Hole,' so as to bring home to her the self-accusation that she had made. For a while talk went round, and gossips surmised : but the suspicion which Jane had started was directed only to herself. Grief for her child, they thought, had turned her brain : and perhaps thought so still more when, two days later, leaving her effects to be sold behind her back, she gave up the cottage and disappeared from the neighbour-

hood. For a while nobody knew wheres he had gone till word came from Yalemouth that she had been seen down at the quays searching amid incoming vessels for some unknown relative of whom folk had never heard—like enough a figment of her brain—fresh proof, if need be, of a mind unhinged by grief.

Jane's search in the locality where Jim had last been seen extended over months. She got news of him at last in a vessel returning coastwise from Thames to Tyne. He had been on it for its southward trip; but the skipper had larruped him, and while they lay in London port he had disappeared. Still the chances were some other boat might bring him back again.

Jane hung on to that hope for a few weeks more, finding enough work in the locality to keep her single body alive, with time left over for hours spent daily among the quays.

There she came upon strange life, robust, brave, obstreperous, and very rank. In some of the narrow lanes running down to the sea every third house was either a tavern or a brothel. In that locality queer matings, well understood and better suited to its needs, took the place of law. Down from the north each fishing-season brought men, lusty of habit and strong of limb, with no homes of their own. Here local women awaited them, and after a first shore carouse took them home to lodge with them, and throughout the season had them upon their returns. Of these unions children were born, sometimes to the same mating, year following year; at other times the parentage was more mixed, but it seemed mainly the women's concern—a matter for their own choice. The custom brought with it a certain amount of good: the men who kept these temporary homes did not spend all their money on drink as others did, and the women were not looked upon as prostitutes. When their men, let go for a bout of drink, fell to brawling, and were out along the wharf sides with buckled belts, broken bottles, and knives, the port authorities, helpless themselves, would send for their women. And these large strenuous beings, having a temporary vested interest in the threatened lives, would break into the

mêlée, each fetch out her bloody man, and take him home with her, leaving peace in their wake.

Now and again, with a similar sobering effect, they would raid the taverns, and if they found their men too drunk to move would relieve them of their coin, carry it home with them, and give back what they chose to give back the next day. Nor was this proceeding looked upon as thieving: it took the place of incompetent law, and served its turn better perhaps than any Act of Parliament could have done. In a rough-and-tumble way they were saving to Britain the flesh and blood of some of the strongest of her breed; and though in the process morals were nowhere, perhaps, had a more precise code of morals been attempted, the work must have failed.

Jane afterwards spoke her debt to these women among whom, rather as a spectator, seven months of her life were spent. "They showed me how a woman as could keep herself needn't never be afraid of a drunken man: and they taught me as an honest woman needn't mind being called a whore. If she means to do any good she must put up with worse things than that."

When Jane made that remark she had already been so named, though in more legal phrase, not by a drunken sailor but by a London magistrate: and had received the appropriate sentence for the flight of fancy with which police evidence had infected his brain. But that is to anticipate by four or five years the stage of her career to which she has now brought us.

Summer was beginning when news came which carried Jane to the flat banks of Thames. Jim was reported as having signed on with a company of large shipowners trading East. Yalemouth ceased then to have any possibilities for her; and having no goods to dispose of, she was up and gone the next day. She tramped to London, covering the distance within a week, and took up her abode in the immeasurable wilderness lying east, in the neighbourhood of the docks.

On this removal, the means of basket-making being no more to her hand, she changed her trade, and took up a

skilled labour, almost the only one at that time belonging exclusively to women, the making, namely, of the fine chains by which, in those days, watches used to be wound. This being a home labour she could choose her own hours ; and living frugally in a single room she was even able to save a little. It was the last time in her life that she practised individual providence, and even now it had an ulterior motive lying outside herself. Until she had Jim back under her wing there was no knowing what his need of her might be. If he required a home she must be prepared to give it him.

Time was favourable to her plan : years went by, her little store of money accumulated, but no Jim came home to her.

Meanwhile heart and eye and brain were absorbing the life that lay around her. She began to know people, to enter into their lives, and to feel her way dimly toward the mission which was to be hers. Her trouble was that she could not care for souls if the bodies that invested them remained beyond her. In those foul and narrow streets she saw a net spread by the devil, aided by all the powers that be, to drag man down into hell. Her wonder was that human nature survived : where it did she thanked God for it, puzzling a little to know at what point contact remained.

What afflicted her most was that among these men and women their laughter was the most horrible thing of all. If she could give them something clean to laugh at it would be a beginning.

She started going into public-houses, buying a glass of beer, taking a sip, and pouring out the rest upon the floor. "Because I know when I've 'ad enough : you don't !" she would say to amazed inquirers. She became a character, not unpopular. It was a game to try and get the leavings of her glass before she spilled it ; but her hand never failed. "Makes 'em sick to see it wasted !" she remarked to a missionary who, doubtful of her wits, nevertheless befriended her. "And sick's the only good turn one can do 'em sometimes. They load up their stomachs

like camels—something cruel.” “Ah!” replied the missionary solemnly. “They do! And how are they going to get through the needle’s eye?”

At that Jane laughed: and the missionary, who had not said it as a joke, was afflicted by her undue levity.

Jane got herself recognized; people would wait for her to come; they began to like her. She was sharp with her tongue, but she never said a pious word or talked religion.

“You must carry the Lord’s message to ’em,” said the missionary, “before you can turn their hearts.”

“It’s their stomachs *I* want to turn,” said Jane, keeping to her point. “If you talk to a whale about a bird of paradise, it’ll only think you mad.”

She did not know, perhaps, that if you talk to a gospel missionary as she talked, you convey very much the same impression. The missionary shook his head.

So far the superiority of Jane’s method showed only in this: she was able to go into places where the other did not dare—and on her immunity in that matter, merely remarked, “If you laugh in the face of a tiger he can’t eat you.”

Possibly that is true: it awaits the experiment. But in saying it Jane was reckoning on nature more lovable than human—than human, that is to say, when it stands on its own dignity.

One day she tried her recipe on a magistrate at their first time of meeting: and he sentenced her to ten days without option. It is true that she applied her recipe to these also, and did them smiling; but this annoyed the wardresses as much as it had annoyed the magistrate, whose faint reflection or elongated shadow they were. Afterwards they came to know her better, and liked her well: but the magistrate, to whom her repeated appearances became troublesome, remained impervious to her charms.

This was during her street-corner days when she stood outside public-houses bearing a pail of whitewash and a brush wherewith to wash black sinners white.

She did not as a rule operate herself; but deserted wives with starved children, coming to know of it, sought her as a

friend. Taking a dip with the brush they would dart into the bar, daub the back or face of the inebriate husband, and out again.

This was a remedy of desperation, and was seldom used by wives living with their husbands, since it brought aftermath : but sometimes they did it for each other.

The device was more practical and popular for those deserted ones whose maintenance by order of a magistrate had fallen into arrears. It became an acceptable joke among barmates, and was more efficacious for raking up back debts than the belated and expensive magisterial operation of a quarterly summons. Often it sufficed for a woman to enter her husband's favourite bar on a Saturday night and inform her indebted spouse that Jane stood outside with her pail. The mere fear of becoming a sign-post of Heaven's grace frequently produced from reluctant pockets as much as a shilling in the pound of what was owing. Magistrates could not do what Jane did.

Of course she paid for her success in suffering ; and wishing to possess the earth she learned to be meek. Men would wreak upon her the vengeance which their more fugitive wives had escaped : and many times she had to buy a new bucket, and of whitewash a fresh supply. But she did not summon the exacerbated males either for loss or injury.

Finding, on these moral marauding expeditions of hers, that clothes became a target for discharges difficult to wash off, she took to wearing white of a strong washable material. This made her a thoroughly popular character. Jane and her bucket presently attracted friendly crowds, not all intent on entering the public's door.

This annoyed the publicans : law and order abetted and Jane was summoned for obstructing the police in their duty and for conduct likely to lead to a breach of the peace.

In answer to the latter charge her defence was that she never objected to what was done to her ; and interests of peace being safely ventilated on her person why need any complain ? But she had not sufficient legal phraseology to carry her point in a court of law. In consequence of this her convictions multiplied and her sentences gradually

lengthened, till having reached his maximum, the magistrate, at the end of his own wits, set the police-court doctor to examine into hers.

He reported her sane, but suffering from religious exaltation. Jane had talked to the doctor of salvation not coming into the belly by drugs, but by the draught of the spirit of the Lord. "Let the spirit of the Lord blow through you," said Jane, "and you'll be a vessel for righteousness more than all the medicine bottles in the world."

Just as an experiment the magistrate discharged her with a caution. Wishing to be nice to him, and seeing that they did not become friends, Jane transferred her energies to another district, which though it was only "across the way," as it were, made her chargeable before another bench.

Her fame had gone before her; and the new magistrate, visited by this standing nuisance for the first time, and wishing to make short work of it, inclined to be drastic.

The toppers of the neighbourhood bore the affliction better than he did. Jane had got the laugh of them: an undercurrent of public opinion was upon her side, their grievances were merely individual, and passed when the drink left them. But when, with the brush in her own hand, she attacked a publican (salting of beer being the charge against him), vested interests were touched not in one person alone, and the thing could not be tolerated. Toppers from another district—who knew not her kindness—were bribed to fall on her, and did so with zeal untempered by discretion. The defender of the people's right to pure liquor went down smiling into the gutter, and there lay too weak and pummelled to rise. "They made a pickled herring of me," she said to account for her state of mud and filth when the police arrested her: but she laid no other charge, and was in consequence charged herself with being drunk and disorderly. "Smelt horribly of drink, your worship," said a constable in giving evidence.

"So I did," said Jane; for the gutter was not a nice one. This time she received the longest sentence possible. The prison chaplain, meaning to be kind, and hearing that she had a son, advised her to go and live with him.

"I'm looking for him," said Jane, and stated some of the facts.

"Well," said the chaplain, "but you don't expect to find him here, do you?"

This was a new view of the matter, which in her evangelical zeal seemed not to have struck her before.

"Here have I been missing Jim!" she said, and became almost a formed character.

But though for a while she kept out of the police-courts she could not lose touch with the dregs of humanity which lay around. As there was no turning back, she went deeper still, and began (not in the acquired sense) to walk the streets.

She had not thought they could reveal to her much that was new. But eyes had not told her everything; consorting in dark corners with women who in search of custom could no longer face the light, she like 'stout Cortez' and his men saw another half of the world opening before her. As at the lifting of a great lid up came the fumes.

Some, when they come on these things, fall degenerate into a horror of sex. But with Jane it was not so. Clean herself, she still saw rightly poor battered human nature of which she was a part, and time and again blessed God that she had known Ben with his frail humanness, and even from Tom, whose lessons for her had seemed well over, found something to learn anew. In this rehandling of types Wally also had his place—there were more Wallys in the world than she had ever dreamed: and they could not help themselves.

Jane was now a woman of thirty-five; she felt that she had passed a stage. Having had her experience and come out of it, she had no wish to return. - But now a passion for youth seized her; for this was the thing of beauty above all which the world set out to destroy; the monstrous slaughter which went on in this and other cities was not so much of virtue and innocence as of youth—for virtue and innocence are but conditions of life: youth is life itself. Jane was not sure that she had conducted her own life either with virtue or innocence, but she had treasured her youth; and the inheritance she had not wasted was with

her still. "Please God," she prayed, "let me laugh hearty till I die!"

Later, when speaking to her own people, she gave a more reasoned basis for that life-long prayer. "The man as can give all his laughter to the Lord has a pure heart," she said. Here, and now, her difficulty was to find any laughter that did not seem to take men farther away. Yet she came upon it once.

A woman whose face she could not see was talking to her—of the things she could best talk about. She was no longer young, life for her had lost its zest: but she owned that drink still comforted her: also—"I like 'em young," she remarked. She chuckled reminiscently. "There was a lad once come to me, and he asked me how much. 'A shilling,' I said. He told me it was his first time. He didn't quite think it was mine; but he thought me a young un, he did. And when he'd give me his shilling and was gone, I looked at it under the light; and it wasn't a shilling, it was a pound. I did laugh! But he hadn't gone far, and I run after him. 'Ye bloody fool, ye've give me a pound,' I said; and—see him look—I did laugh then! He wasn't so innocent as not to be surprised at me bringing it back to 'im; and he give me a shilling for it right enough—aye, and a kiss too." She chuckled. "I reckon he remembers me," she said.

"And you remember him," said Jane.

"Yes," went on the woman slowly. "He was a bit of life, he was. One 'ud get fond of 'em if only they'd give you time."

So in her dull blotted mind one decently pleasurable memory remained of a youth whom, not having the will to rob, she had done less to corrupt. Jane took that memory away with her.

She herself was no victim of the old conventional idea that the inexperienced is always the seduced; or that seduction comes from one sex alone. But she knew that every night, even in the meanest streets, went kind qualities of youth running the gauntlet of haggard age, and that the only saving grace for these was the joy of life—a thing in

their circumstances far more difficult to attain than 'religion'; for while religion is many and a thing of creeds, joy is one: and Jew, Christian, and Gentile may all share it alike.

Down in the dark little streets behind the docks and beside the river Jane walked night after night, watching for eyes. Of some she came to have an almost instant understanding, but many others said nothing to her at all. Letting the spirit of life guide her she touched here and there, and seldom found herself at fault, replied always when spoken to, gave company when it was sought, and never preached.

Out of her experiences she formed a strange resolve, and for a couple of years took what came of it as a gift from the Lord. It did much to restore her sense of laughter.

For this game she had to change her lodging, and finding one queer kindred spirit—a true Salvationist born out of due time, bearing the nickname of Red-hot John—went to live with him and his deaf wife. Occupying a room above theirs, she had experiences better than fairy-tale. Red-hot John believed in her with a blind trust; while his deaf wife, incapable perhaps of so deep a trust had she known more, believed sufficiently knowing less, and fenced round providentially by her affliction spent undisturbed nights, while Red-hot John knelt up in his bed and prayed.

Jane's resolve was never to refuse if a man asked to come home with her. If he did so he had been sent to her by the Lord; had he been sent to her by the Devil she would have accepted her mission with equal faith. To that inquiry which met her now and again, she would reply, "You may if you like." But she imposed her conditions: the man must behave decently by the way; and if his tongue ran loose, "I don't talk that way myself," she said.

As a rule this singular modesty seemed to increase her attraction. But at Jane's lodging a great surprise awaited them; generally it made them angry. "I didn't ask you to come," she would say, in answer to their expostulations; and when required further to explain why she had let them come—"To keep you out of mischief for one day at least," she told them.

But she did not preach. Decent accommodation, food, a bed in an adjoining room were theirs if they wished for it : if they did not wish for it they could go.

These matters were not always settled without argument, and where needed, Jane gave good worldly advice. Some she informed that they were too old for the game, others that they were too young : and those that remained over, of the betwixt and between age, were "old enough to know better."

This was the class which gave her most trouble ; but it was not for nothing that she kept a pepper-pot upon her chimney-piece. Then as they broke into loud sneezings, she would say, "There's a hot-gospeller down below : and if you go making that noise he'll come and preach to yer. It's his house you're in, let me tell yer, not mine."

Whereat in great fear of blackmail and other terrors of darkness her unhappy visitant would arise and flee forth into the night ; and as often as not in her hearts of hearts Jane would be sorry for him, yet would not relent from a course which did something one way or another to defend youth, either by keeping it out of mischief itself, or from the mischief intended to it by others.

In these experimental adventures Red-hot John took a greedier pleasure than Jane ; nor as a rule did he wait for his spiritual assistance to be invited. At the first sign of liveliness overhead, loud prayings would ascend from the room below : and the words of piety would come up through the boards with a naked distinctness calculated to put the old Adam of Jane's visitors to shame.

"There's a saint as is happy in his bed !" said Jane to herself, hearing him ; and quaint and refreshing was the vision it afforded of him kneeling so exercised, and his stone-deaf wife sleeping comfortable and undisturbed beside him.

But though at these lurid episodes the prudent may shake their heads, and doubt what good they could do, let them not forget to weigh against them other windfalls of a different kind. Many a time because of Jane a young sailor, drunk on his first landing, found a clean bed to sleep

in, comfort for his head next morning, and the earnings of his voyage saved to him. For Jane still went day by day to places where seafaring men congregate, asking for news of her lost Jim, but getting no word of him.

And here just one other of her humanist experiments shall be briefly told. One day Jane brought home with her not a man but a young girl. There was nothing special either in her story or her character. By very ordinary weakness of will she had got into a place where she did not wish to be. Life had pushed her down, she had not the strength to get up again. Jane offered her a roof and a bed, for she was very young. "You can stay as long as you like," said Jane; "and you can go when you like. You can be decent with me, if you want to be decent. And if you don't, well, I haven't brought you here to bully you."

It was a failure, for she had a divided will; she came and went, and Jane never showed her the door, and never questioned her. One day she went and never came back, and Jane, who for her sake had ceased to have dealings with men, relapsed into old ways.

For of all the characters you have ever met she was the most incorrigible.

CHAPTER V

A NIGHT'S LODGING

IN the light from the open door of a Thames Street tavern Jane saw a youth stagger out across the cobbled pavement and tip over into the gutter. There he lay, not attempting to rise. After him came a woman, a good deal less drunk than he: she stole over and stooped down beside him. "Pick yourself up, dearie," she said, and felt for his pocket the while.

Jane stepped forward. "You leave my lad alone," she cried.

The woman leered at her. "Ow! yours is he? I didn't know as 'e belonged to you." She shambled off, leaving Jane and the youth together.

Jane bent over him. It was raining hard, and the runnings of the kennel seemed to enter at the collar of his coat and flow out through the soles of his boots.

"You'd better get up," said Jane, helping him.

"Eh?" He bumbled for a while, but nothing articulate. She got him half-way to his feet; then he slipped from her hold, sat, and the puddle flowed out round him.

After that she lifted him by main force, and kept her hand on him.

"Where's your home?" she asked.

"Haven't got a home."

"Where d'you want to go?"

He hiccupped, and having no other choice, said the proper thing, "I'm coming long o' you."

Jane took possession of him. "I'll hold up your feet for you, if you can manage to walk 'em." Thus they progressed.

She got him to her lodging, steadied him between the door and the wall while she struck a light, and turning to set it in a safe place, saw him lurch heavily across the room and fall down upon the bed. After that there was no moving him.

She spread a cloth under his head, fearful of what might happen, and proceeded to take off his boots. He was wet through from head to foot, and blotched with mud. Gradually she got his clothes off him, and put him under the sheet. Round his neck as she drew off the shirt she found a small oilskin pouch suspended by a string: that she left to him.

Before long there was need to wash his face and do a little readjustment. "He'll feel better now," she remarked then.

She lighted a fire, put his shoes in the fender, hung his clothes to dry, and got her own supper.

After a while she began overhauling his garments. They were very much out of repair; she started on them as they dried, the smaller ones first. With several hours' occupation ahead and her own bed occupied, she settled down for a night's mending.

The youth slept heavily on, a big huddled mass under the patchwork quilt; with cheek deep down in pillow and face to wall he lay negative and inert as one rejecting company.

In the small hours Jane, having finished with his under-raidment, fell to work on his coat. She remembered the woman with greedy hand searching for pockets. Now she, with different intent, did likewise. From one and another she drew out many odds and ends, things confirming her first guess that he had come from seafaring. From an inner breast-pocket she took a small bag of coin, and a bundle of papers very greasy and worn, tied up with a piece of twine. "Saved yer those," she said to herself, laying them on one side.

Presently the candle, having burnt all night, guttered down to its socket and went out. She drew up the blind, and saw over a vista of dirty roofs and chimney-tops the

white beginnings of dawn. The light made no difference to the sleeper.

Having still plenty to do, she worked on, leaving him undisturbed. A couple of hours later he moaned and writhed, swung his head trying to get away from it, then burrowed into the pillow deeper than before.

At eight o'clock, deeming him then sufficiently ready to wake, she brought him a cup of tea and his bag of money. He took no account of either. Then she applied, with wet bandages to his head, a remedy in which she believed—a drastic mixture of turpentine, ammonia, and vinegar mercifully tempered of its strength, which she had already tried on others. Before long this sovereign balm operating upon his scalp gave him a wish to sit up. He tried, but failed.

Then, with eyes grown aware of the light, "Hallo, where in hell have I got to?" ejaculated the fuddled youth.

"Where you didn't ought to be," said Jane; "in a strange bed."

His answer hung fire for a moment. Then, "Who are you?" he demanded a little fiercely.

"I'm the woman as you come 'ome with last night."

"Oh!"

Everything was explained: he collapsed and lay still for a while.

Jane sat working at her small window, letting him take his own time to find himself. After a short drowse he tried once more to get up.

He felt about him, and finding himself lying stark naked under the bedclothes, looked round for his belongings.

He saw his coat lying in her hands and demanded it with an oath.

She took it across to him. He sat up and started a search.

"You've been at my pockets, ye dirty trollop!" he said then.

"I have," replied Jane: "and there's your money all lying by yer." She indicated the bag of coin, placed on a chair beside him.

He took it, weighed it in his hand, put it under his pillow, and rolled over again.

But a moment later he wrenched himself up, and sat, for the clearance of his wits. "I ought to be getting up!" said he.

"You'd better lie still a bit," counselled Jane. "Your things are none so dry as they might be yet. Sopping wet they was."

"Why?"

"'Cos the gutter was wet when you lay down in it to take your beauty-sleep. That's where I come along and found yer."

He looked at her, saying nothing.

Once more Jane tried him with a cup of tea. This time he drank it.

"What's your name?" she inquired placably. "Will you have anything to eat?"

"What d'you want to know my name for?" he asked suspiciously.

"Till I do," said Jane, "what else can I call you but 'fool'? For that's what you are—seems to me plain."

This straight dealing, coming from her, woke in the draggled brain a spark of resentment.

"You're a ——" With double blank cartridge the youth told her what, in his opinion, she was.

"Now so happens there you're wrong," said Jane. "Anyway I've been mending your clothes for yer. So you might speak decent whatever be the facts. Come, who are yer? Where do ye come from?"

"I shan't tell yer," said the boy sullenly.

"Well, I could have found out for myself," replied Jane, "had I cared to; for I reckon it's all in these papers."

That fact seemed to impress him. Without further trouble he gave her his name.

Jane laid down her work, and resting her two hands hard on her knees looked at him for a while, speechless. The years rushed through her brain. Only her eyes told then what fire was kindled beneath.

"D'you know who *I* am?" she inquired at last. "I'm your mother! Oh yes! there's no getting over that. So sure as your name's Jim Mattock, my lad, I'm the cause of yer—I and another."

The youth stared stupefied: then suddenly turned his face to the wall.

"Yes, you may well be ashamed of yourself!" she said. "See what the Devil's led you to now?" So she spoke, while her own heart leapt.

But this poor limb was too young to be hardened to the human horror of the discovery. He began to blubber miserably.

While his sobs shook the bed she went on still hard of tone. "Crying won't alter it. You want a new 'cart: and I'm going to give it yer."

He stopped sobbing to listen to her.

"What d'you think of yerself now?" she inquired.

He smeared his fist over his face, and turning to his parent a gaze wherein fear mingled with resentment, said: "Tain't of myself I'm thinking—it's you!" He eyed her hard. "Oh, Mother, to think as you've come to this!"

"Ah!" said Jane coolly. "I've come to it—or else it's come to me. One has to meet the Devil face to face to know what he's like. Never you mind me. What about yourself? What was you doing last night?"

"I can't remember."

"Too drunk?"

"I suppose."

"Can you remember coming here?"

"No."

"Can you remember anything?"

"No, Mother, I can't. I don't want to." Again he turned his face to the wall.

"Well, you needn't: there's nothing for you to remember. I took you, so as to look after you. But I don't suppose this is the first time you haven't been able to remember things."

Then she bade him get up, going into the other room the while. When she came back, she found him presentable, and able at last to eat something.

She went downstairs, and spoke to Red-hot John. "Have you had a prayerful night?" she inquired.

"I have that," replied John. "Is he with you still?"

He looked at her mild and trustful as ever, but a little puzzled. It was now after ten : and such a circumstance he had not known happen before.

"He is," replied Jane. "God answered more prayers last night than I could count. It's my son come back to me."

"Glory, glory !" cried Red-hot John. "Safe in the arms of Jesus."

"Not quite so safe as that yet !" said Jane, while John went over and shouted the news in his deaf wife's ear, who after three tellings, once to right, and twice to left, took it to heart, and thought it wonderful.

Having planted her joy below, Jane went up again, and sat many hours with her son hearing the story of his life. When all was told, though much frailty and weakness were revealed, she had nothing wherewith to reproach him : rather was it the other way. He had been down into the depths—and many devils had had hold of him, yet she recognized him still. Here and there was still the boy in him ; he was young.

Thereafter she told him things about herself, and how life had gradually come to her from hand to hand by way of her fellow-beings. In the joy of finding him she talked of sanctities and mysteries which to her eyes were clear. But for these things she found that the child of her grief had no understanding. Her talk of 'the light within' was to him almost meaningless. For seven years Jim had slept steerage, and sailed into strange ports and seas ; and his mind was tarred to his surroundings. Man was a thing of appetites ; that he knew. But in Jane's teaching hunger had also its joy.

"But ain't it natural, Mother ? " he protested at last, glimpsing in her vision heights he could not hope to climb.

"Yes : so's going without our clothes natural. But that ain't any good reason for doing it all times and places, so far as I know. I was your mother at sixteen, through being 'natural' as you call it : and that done you no good. Making one's own living by work ain't so natural as you might think : but it's got to be done."

"Is this your bed, Mother?" inquired Jim suddenly: he was still sitting on it.

"It is when drunk boys don't sleep in it," she said. "When they do I let 'em have it to 'emselves."

This sort of talk he understood better, and became reassured of her. He owned to a great craving for drink, and she did not blame him for it. "It's natural," she said. "If I'd had to live like you, where should I be now?"

But even as she spoke allowance, and denied blame, her spirit leapt fiercely for the possession of him. She took hold of him with her hands, and hot-eyed she challenged him.

"You've got a body a man could be proud of!" she cried. "Can't yer keep it for God? Can't yer see by looking at yerself, as yer was made for joy? I'm your mother: you've been alive all these twenty years; and how much joy have we had of each other yet? Jim, I'll give ye a home, I'll give ye a home now! It's what I ought to have done all along: but I didn't. That's my sin, as I didn't give you a home."

She broke down and wept upon his breast, and Jim put his face down over the nice parting of her crisp waving hair and wept too.

CHAPTER VI

SON OF GRIEF

JIM only remained with Jane one blessed week ; before their meeting he had signed on to a new company of big steamers trading West. Ocean steam-traffic was then in its early stages ; but it was already speeding up. New York had been touched from an English port in thirteen days ; it was a world's marvel ; and the prospect of having Jim home with her once every six or eight weeks in place of only twice a year made his mother willing enough to relinquish him since the chance had come.

For her son's sake, the bare room with the small cupboard-chamber behind, which she had hitherto occupied, now ceased to satisfy her. They said farewell to Red-hot John and his wife, and spent their last three days together in furnishing the small two-roomed home to which Jim was to return.

Jane excited his mind with bright table-cloths and china, which he could carry in his mind's eye ; and finding that he was a Catholic still (at long intervals so far as practice was concerned) got him a small statue of Our Lady very like the one whose essential hollowness had been demonstrated to her in the unhappy year of his birth. Hoping better things of it, she put it on the chimney-piece, and choosing as cheerful a crucifix as she could find set that over his bed. Laying herself out to secure for him the sort of clean conscience which earlier habit had inculcated, she accompanied him to his church, and while he went into a little box for the thing to be done, prayed powerfully for his soul. Apparently the process did him good : he came home sheepishly happy, to a last meal of tripe and onions

and a pint of beer. Jane saw him on to his ship sober, and went home to her waiting solitude, sad but triumphant.

While he was away she read a history of America, descriptions of New York, and all the snippets of news she could get of what was going on in that country. Accounts rather puzzled her. Americans were then making a great noise on a point which seemed to her too simple for discussion. The question of Slave emancipation made division of the nation; and several millions of civilized Christians were getting ready to have each other's blood—each in defence of the sacred name of Liberty. Jane's comment was embracing, and carries down even to our own day. "If people'll fight about that they'll fight about anything," she said. "It's like drink to 'em." But the actual fighting was not to be yet.

Jim's return, however, was not so speedy on this occasion as she had hoped. His ship, after discharging at New York, received fresh orders, and went down coastwise to other Atlantic ports before returning home. Higher freights ruled out West, and the owners had been quick to seize their opportunity. He was absent for six months.

He came home looking strong and well. Jane met him at the quay, and brought him back sober to a warm fireside and a meal which evidently pleased him. He took the opportunity, when presently she helped him to a change of coat, to rub his cheek against hers like a child that accepts comfort and pardon. Later on he sat fondling her, and saying 'Mammy' softly, many times over in a tone of great satisfaction. He was like a tired animal come home to grass, and contact with her was the green field in which he grazed.

She understood him well enough, and with motherly benevolence gave the quieting touch to that headier thing which his long cramped and cabined body now craved for.

"Where's your baccy?" she inquired presently.

He brought it out, and his ship's pay as well. He put that down on the board.

"What? Am I to keep it for you?" she asked.

"Don't you want none of it yourself?" he inquired,

concealing his weakness behind an assumption of her just claims on him.

"I'm a self-supporting woman," Jane told him. "But while you are here you can pay for your board if you want to."

She took a pound of him, with promise to return anything that was over on the day he sailed. Reluctantly he took back the rest into his own precarious keeping.

"Or you can bank it," proposed his mother.

"I ain't a banking man," said Jim sadly.

"Then you can put it in the tea-caddy, and go and help yourself as you happen to want. Better keep out a bit for pocket-money though; and what about clothes? I'll mend for ye, but I won't make."

Thus she made ways of providence easy for him, not letting him be afraid either of himself or her.

Jim's spirits rose, and produced presently the semblance of a free man in him. The next day, when his mother was at work, he went out and shopped for himself in perfect safety. Having replenished his wardrobe with sober judgment, he also bought a large cake and some winkles, and for his mother a brightly coloured shawl very much to his own taste.

She wore it for love of him with a shuddering sense of publicity. "This," she said to herself, when eyes turned on her, "is worse than going naked, a deal worse! But it all comes of having a man child."

Her heart warmed to the afflicting article: the very clumsiness of his affections played on her soft places, and she knew it for woman's weakness. She knew that, in a way, she liked better this gaudy shawl than a well-chosen one of sober hue, for it expressed more fully Jim's contentment in the home-coming she had provided him.

And the next day her man child was drunk—far beyond what so young a stomach could stand. She cleaned up the disgusting object she found lying at her door; and while she did so he babbled to her in maudlin tones of penitence. "Oh, my Mammy, my dear Mammy, do forgive me! Those devils they tempted me. They did, Mammy, they did!"

Of all this she said no word when the next day he encountered her with clearer wits, and eyes which plainly enough invited her to reproach him. Her only sign was to put the gawdy shawl away into a drawer and revert to her old one.

It was the beginning of a duel which, starting with signs, came at last to words. The next she knew was that the tea-caddy was missing; and after long search, since to question would be humiliating to both of them, she found it put away in the same drawer with the red and green shawl wrapped round it.

From this she gathered that some of Jim's money still remained in it; but though curious to know how much his bout—together with the shawl and other things—had cost him, she would not look to see.

She put the tea-caddy back into its place; but, after her Saturday's absence for shoppings, returned to find two pounds ten, in gold, lying out on the table. "You're leaving your money about, Jim," she told him.

"It isn't mine; it's yours," he answered, dogged of tone to meet her expected opposition.

"None of your lies," she countered.

"I've given it you," he asserted.

"Well, that's a coward's way too," said Jane. "Fancy a man afraid to look his own wages in the face!"

Jim fell back for aid on Scripture. "The wages of sin is death," said he: "And you can't live on sea without sinning."

"Ah! now you are talking like a reformed character," she replied sardonically. "Here! if you want to snivel go outside!" Whenever sinners were soft to themselves Jane became hard as nails.

Jim stooped forward, picked up the three coins and threw them into the fire.

"That won't do for 'em either," said Jane. "Any silly ought to know that."

She sat contemplative, and watched the increasing incandescence of the Crown's currency amid the hot coals. Those three gold pieces, assimilative yet refusing to burn,

became for Jane a symbol. She, too, could quote Scripture.

"What a way to treat 'em," she exclaimed. "They haven't done no harm ; they haven't worshipped no graven image with flute, harp, sackbut, and psaltery. A real Nebuchadnezzar, that's what you are! I'd rather have been mother to a donkey."

"It's what I be," said Jim sullenly. "Anyway I warned yer."

"Oh yes! and Balaam's ass knew what he was talking about: but it wasn't his own corns he was treading on. Well, you haven't got the love of money, I'll say that for you ; and I'd rather you threw it away than kep' it all to your own fist like some people. But what a waste of time it means, Jimmy, if that's your only way to feel safe! It 'ud take me over three weeks to earn as much money as that, working hard from morning to night ; and how long's it took you ? And does it pay you for your trouble where it is now ? Why, what a fool I'd have to think myself, if at the other end, when I'd got it, I felt I must throw it all away ! "

As she spoke one of the coins fell through the coals on to the hearth ; another followed.

"Now then, Abednego, out with you!" said Jane. "Littlest and last, but you've got to come too."

She poked out the recalcitrant coin. It lay with its fellows, cooling a red-hot face in a white sprinkling of ash.

"So you've give 'em to me, have you ? " she said at last.

"Please, Mother."

"Well, if you'll pick 'em up for me, I'll keep 'em. That's a bargain, Jimmy. And they'll always be there waiting in the box for you to come back when you want 'em. You'll know 'em," said Jane ; "they're marked for life."

Jim was no great talker ; and Jane, slow to question, had put off inquiring into the record of his six months away from her. But when, of his own accord, he came and sat in her lap and put his arms round her, she thought the time for it had come. "Well, Jim," she asked, "when are you going to tell me about yourself ? "

"I ain't got nothing to tell."

"Why! but at any rate you've lived, haven't yer?"

"Ah, I suppose I have—somehow."

"How many times did you get drunk? I'm not blaming yer; I only want to know."

Not more than a dozen, Jim thought.

"And how many ports was you at?"

"Two."

"Six apiece," said Jane. "That was doing it handsome, that was. There's some pubs must close down when you aren't there to help 'em to keep open."

Jim sighed despairingly.

"I don't want no drink when I'm setting up o' you," he said then, as though that explained everything.

"Lord! I can't go all round the world just to be sat on. Can't ye sit safe on yourself?"

"No, Mother, I can't," said Jim. "That's all about it! If I didn't go for the booze, I'd go for the women. Which of me'd you rather?"

"Depends a good deal on the women," replied Jane. "Which of all the boozes was I, when you first come along o' me?"

"I didn't know anything about it," mumbled Jim, shamed by the reminder. "You know I didn't."

"That's it. You take up with the one, and it only leads you on to the other—till you don't know sometimes which is which. None of your talk to me about drink keeping a man from women! I know well enough."

"But I haven't often, Mother," adumbrated Jim. "And I've always gone to confession after it—honest I 'ave."

"Oh yes, you're a good Papist, I don't deny," said Jane; "but that ain't the same as being a good Christian. You know that well enough. Confession?—a patch over a blind eye: that's all that is! And I suppose you've always got your scrapuler on too, haven't yer? Do you take that off when you starts drinking, or d'you keep it as a stomach-pad? No? Nor when you do the other thing? My word, then! if I'd been in all the bad places that

lucky-bag of yours has been to, I'd know better what to think of yer and how to handle yer."

Jim looked at her sombrely. "Good thing you 'aven't, Mother. You wouldn't never speak to me again."

"Go along! D'you suppose I can't fancy worse things about you than you'd ever have the wits or foolishness to do of your own notion?"

"No," said Jim. "You don't know nothing about men, Mother—their ways. We're a damned dirty lot. Women are different."

"What do you know about women?" retorted Jane in a high tone of contempt. "And you ain't much of a man yet," she added.

"I'll be a worse one yet," said Jim, miserably convinced of the downward course awaiting him. "Just a bit of dirt, that's what I am."

Jane turned round on him. "And you sitting on me! Look here, my lad, you've got to get your mind straight; and I'll tell you a thing or two. Pigs wallow because they have to live in sties, and no choice given 'em: and foul beasts they are too. But turn 'em out to grass and they're as reasonably clean as most other beasts—barring they like a clean roll in the mud now and then. Well, you've been pigging it all these eight years along of a lot of older pigs, worse mothered, most of 'em, than you was—and longer used to the sty. Where was 'knowing better' to come from with most of them? But the thing as makes a man of you, and men of them—spite of everything, 't isn't the pigging it as you talk so much about; and it's not all the drinking, and the wenching, and the wasting money as you don't know how to spend. It's the other things—the leavings: the dark cold nights, and the lights out on the sea, and the sound of the waves up against the ship, and the cry 'Man overboard!' and a life got to be saved; and the climbing up to the rigging in the race of a storm, and the first far-off sight of land and the lights of homes—not yours: and the loneliness, and the silence, and the strength to bear it all: that's where God's got you, my boy. I'd give my right hand to have you clean and sober: but a loose woman

ain't always of the lowest ; and a pint of beer ain't all poison. For some it's poison when they gets to two, for some not till it gets to four : and 'twould be better, p'raps, if you could do without any of it. But talk of loose women ! I had to do once with a man as loose as most of 'em ; yet I had a kindness for him—aye, we were friends too, of a kind ; and I was sorry enough for him when he died. He done me harm, and he done me good, though it's not to be generally reckoned so. But whether he done best by me or not isn't in his hands now, Jim, it's in yours. Ah, you may well look surprised : but it was by him that I had you—either for a blessing or a curse ; make it how you like ! That was your own father, Jim."

The 'child of sin' laid his cheek against his mother's face, and with that caress she went on. "Don't talk o' loose women to me ! There's some as would say I was one myself. If you respect women, Jim, you may be weak, you may let yourself go with 'em : but you won't go with 'em same way as if they was mere dirt, and you won't leave 'em the same way—not quite."

"It ain't good church doctrine I'm telling you, Jim : but it's sound sense. Here, make up the fire !" For she reckoned that she had indulged him enough for that time.

When he had done, Jim knelt up and put his head on his mother's shoulder, and sighed. "Oh, if I could have a clean girl, Mother !" he said : "one as I could like."

"Well, why can't you have her ?" said Jane. "She could come live with me and we keep house together."

Jim looked shocked. "What are you saying, Mother ? You and she couldn't live together like that, and we not married !"

"I wouldn't stop yer marrying. What else did you say 'clean' for ?"

"Oh, like that ?" said Jim. "I don't know what I meant, I'm sure."

"Well," said Jane, "I meant sense. What's to prevent you marrying ?"

"Bad habits ; I haven't got the money or the time. Besides I'm always away in foreign parts : 'twouldn't be fair."

"Women have more 'unfair' to put up with than that," returned Jane. "It ain't them as sees too little of their husbands as suffers worst—you take my word! You choose your girl and marry 'er, and I'll see as you're a good husband to her, don't fear!"

For Jane never lacked confidence in herself toward those she loved.

Jim put his arms round her, and swung hugging her. "Oh, Mother, why did I only have you now?" he cried.

"Because I started on yer too soon," said Jane.

"Yer didn't! Yer didn't!" cried Jim. "It was only others as come between. You couldn't have 'ad me too soon, if only I could have stayed with yer."

"There, there!" went Jane. "You've got to learn what life is, now you're in it. You keep your 'eart till you come 'ome, Jim; then you open your eyes and the Lord'll fill 'em. Haven't He made the world good?"

This was the last day before Jim sailed again. They parted hopefully; Jim found happiness in shedding a few tears, as his way was, and Jane believing that the main problem of his life was soon to be solved, did actually begin, so soon as his back was turned, to cast round for a girl, suitable mate to herself and him.

But before the full time of waiting was over, Jim's career was rounded off by a cleaner cut from evil surroundings than even Jane had planned for him. One of his shipmates, coming home by an earlier sailing, brought word of it.

During a tavern brawl in New York harbour Jim had been badly knifed, and three days afterwards had died in hospital without having recovered consciousness.

A month later on the ship's return his effects were brought back to her. Everything that he had possessed in the world was there—things she had made for him, one or two gifts, and a few letters along with the rest. The captain, whom she went to see, gave him a passably good character, and on the human side spoke well of him, dwelling a little more perhaps on the favourable points for the sake of the wan-faced woman with steadfast eyes who sat tearless to hear him.

It was a quarrel over a girl, Jane then learned, which had brought her lad to his end : as to the rights of it her informant knew nothing, only that Jim—so far as the fighting was concerned, had not been the aggressor. Of the slayer—no shipmate of Jim's—he could say nothing ; he had got away—at least for the time ; whether the law laid hands on him later he had not heard.

So, like his father, and perhaps like him unavenged, Jim had come by his death in a quarrel about a girl. It was 'in the family,' as Jane would say.

But the narration of the facts brought to her no sense of retributive justice. The superstitious fear which she had once entertained she had long outgrown : it was dead and could not revive. Yet she recognized this as the greatest sorrow she had ever been called on to endure—more hard to bear than loss of husband or child, being out of all proportion to the joy she had had in them. They at least had rounded their brief day of happiness at her side in conditions undisturbed by fears. With Jim it had been otherwise ; precariously come by, precariously held and lost again, he stood for symbol of a blessing she had once wilfully let go ; and if his death remained to her as a reproach, it was not for the shedding of blood, or for a marriage-tie unmade, but for lack of courage and faith and steadfast holding of a life when once it had been given her.

Her resignation struck all who saw. To one, drawn to inquire at that time whence she found strength so calmly to bear her grief, she quoted words which she had lately read from an unnamed writer. Her hearer thought them hardly applicable : they did not explain. But since they helped her and may help others, I give them here :

“ ‘Think of the dead in your joy.’ When you do that,” said Jane, “you’ll find they are alive.”

For Jane had gracious memories, and to her life's end these did not fail. In her heart she added daily Jim's name to these, till all became one—a possession, unbroken, inseparable.

CHAPTER VII

EXIT JANE

WHEN Jim's poor litter of effects came to be sifted, Jane needed more than ever that saving charity of uncommon sense about men and men's ways to which her experience of life was bringing her. Like the geological strata of a forming world, she found therein records of existence which, however much of a date previous to their meeting, were yet part of him. That rubble, the off-scourings of a surface rather soft in character, told her more of him than Jim could ever have done himself. It lay unsorted at the bottom of his sea-chest; and Jane, searching for all proof of him that she could find, must take along with the good the bad also. It gave her a stab now and again: but never did she let him go. "Bless his poor heart!" she cried, surveying this ruffraff of things that will tickle dull cabined lives to laughter, "what a magpie mess of a mind the boy had!"

It was an ordeal, but she saw it through: Jim was teaching her—a little late in the day as it seemed now. "What?" went her protesting heart, "have they got to be dead before they'll tell us, so as we can understand? Do they think as we'm hard; that we can't take what things they've got to show?" In later days she spoke plainly of things she had then learned; and many were offended because of it. "Ah," she once cried, "there ain't much tenderness about 'em; that I've found! I've breasted 'em man and babe; and they both of 'em bites to show as they love yer. It's a queer habit; but you get used to it, and miss it, maybe, after a bit."

The bite of her dead man child was upon her now; but

with it also, memory of things that he had said, pleading the mutual understanding which life in its divided ways refused to them.

“But what’ll I do, Mother, what’ll I do when I’m tempted?”

And she had said: “Get the spirit of the Lord, my boy: laugh at yourself!”

He looked at her puzzled, a little shocked.

“Does God ever laugh, Mother—at sin?”

“He’s laughing all the time,” she said.

“That seems a cruel mock.”

“Not if we learn to laugh too. But there’s war in the world, Jim: and the laugh’s gone wrong, and men are laughing at all the holy things as made us: instead of at all the foolish things as would unmake us. You want the spirit of God in yer to get your laugh right!”

For even then, and more as she grew older, Jane’s doctrine of the spirit of God had no limit in its application. To a cook seasoning a dish, a mother smacking her child, or a man flogging a horse she would say, “Put a little more of the spirit of God into it!” and would judge by their answer, and tell them whether that spirit were in them or no.

In one of her boldest flights she said, “When you sin, take the spirit of God along with you. When you begin sinning, ask a blessing on it; and when you’ve done your sin, thank God for it. It’s what nations do when they go to war, so you may as well do the same. We shall come to our senses some day: but its killing work.”

Jim’s sea-chest was a book of wisdom for Jane; but it was sad reading at the time. It convinced her that amid the life into which he had been plunged her son could not have ‘kept straight’ in the conventional sense. That he had kept the heart of youth at all was a mercy and a great marvel.

Some of the things she now came on amazed her, making apparent that she knew only one half of human nature: woman, and woman’s relations with men. In this new light (or darkness, as the case might be) she searched the

Scriptures and found therein some evidences, but little instruction and no remedy : no remedy at all.

So at last the truth came home to her. As the result of her experience in seeking to guide the feet of youth she found that she did not understand men. "They are simple enough when you get to the right side of 'em," she remarked ; "but it's the wrong side of 'em as beats me. What strange beasts they are to be sure ! We give 'em birth, and we take 'em to bed and board, and we suckle 'em—babes as they be—all our lives long : but I can see, clear enough now, we don't really know the thing as we've got hold of."

Thenceforth to know and to understand became her goal. It might be thought that in her strange missionary experiences of East-end life she had seen human nature stark enough. But no : Jane knew that it wasn't so. "I was woman to 'em, all the time," she told herself. "Even when they went for me, when I drove 'em mad praying over their poor drunken bodies—and I don't wonder at it, I'm sure—even then 'twas as man to woman they sought to get the better of me ; but what they really are by themselves, when woman's left out, I don't know. O Lord, guide me in this dark world, so as I may see light !"

And before many days were over He did so. One night she stood up before the glass above her wash-stand, shore off her long hair, put on male raiment, and said good-bye to the past.

She looked at her changed self in the glass, and saw herself a traveller into an unknown land. Man, as man, was the object she was about to explore. "And the less I talk now the better," she said to herself, "else I'll be found out."

Her few household belongings reduced now to the barest necessities remained for her landlord to dispose of : she left a month's rent lying on the table, and before dawn was gone.

East London was to know her no more. At that point she disappears from history for seven years.

BOOK III

HER MISSION

CHAPTER I

THE TRAVELLER'S RETURN

AMERICA keeps no trace of Jane's footprints during that seven years' pilgrimage ; and as it was then her will to pass out of recognition, there seems no reason why the veil of obscurity should be lifted till she lifts it herself. Whether during that time of searching preparation she bore the name of John or of James Sterling, or some other appellation more remote, record is not to show. The wilderness where-into she was driven of the spirit provided multitude as a covering, and the hermit cell she lived in went with her from place to place.

Of what she encountered in that desert we get trace by certain sayings which in later preachings she let fall. "When I came to 'em," she remarked in summary of her experience, "I found 'em all at it—just on the start—Cain doing his best to kill Abel, and Abel making up his mind to kill Cain : and at last they were such a bloody pair you couldn't tell which was which. And when I left 'em, they'd done killing men on the battlefields, and was doing it on the railroads instead—to show how much the spirit of the Lord was in 'em after they'd had their way. After that they took to killing houses, so as to build Babel ; and New York, being in a tight boot, was beginning to get corns."

The corns have grown more prominent since then, and New York is as proud of them as ever.

In 1867, back in Liverpool again, with only a few pounds

in hand and with her public mission before her, Jane reverted to her own sex. She was then thinner than ever ; and her hair already white at the temples, abundant as of yore, was fast recovering from its curtailment. She could still boast that she had never had a day's illness, though her body bore scars ; and in her jobs at the building trade she had learned to look down from great heights.

However cosmopolitan she might be in theory, this return to the land of her birth revealed a heart still human in its limitations. With a strange uplifting she trod again her native soil, and heard the English intonation of the streets ; and not for lack of sufficient means, but for the joy of a more thorough reabsorption into the old environment, she set out to walk the distance from Liverpool to Shadbury.

Across England at its broadest the way lay mainly east, and the distance two hundred miles : it took her a little over a week. " I walked my way through a pair of shoes, and got back into English make at the other end," she remarked of that sturdy feat by which she renewed acquaintance with English roads.

She had no plans as to how her mission should begin, but was in no doubt whatever that the Lord would lead her and at the right time give the word.

He began, before she had gone more than a day's journey, by taking her money from her. But He did it gently by instalments, warning her that individual possessions could no longer be hers. For now, back in her own land, she met the sharpened face of poverty almost as a new thing. In the great pushing West she had not seen it as here, nor in that strange conjunction with wealth immemorially seated in its possessions, which has become the normal aspect of the hereditary system.

Jane met upon the road many a begging face that did not beg, and some that did. Under these astringent needs of native penury her own small store beautifully diminished ; but she took no count, nor on the score of her own keep had any fears. She had health and strength, her face was set toward home, and in outhouse or barn she found suffi-

cient shelter each night. "Now I smell the osier-beds," she said to herself one day, and saw in vision peaceful places where the pliant instrument of her trade awaited her. It was the Lord's rod, and it budded; for this was at the late middle of spring.

She was then in the beginnings of the level-lying districts in which she had been bred, and saw again the familiar ridges of dikes over wide water-meadows, and in the distance northward, a dark stroke on the sky, the most famous and one of the loveliest of parish towers bearing a name yet more greatly esteemed in the land out of which she had come.

Travelling without respect of the days, and so losing count of them, she became aware by the absence of labour and the sight of folk in their Sunday best that her feet were Sabbath-breaking. It was the time of morning service, and as she passed through a district sprinkled with rural dwellings, she heard from a tiny chapel set in an old graveyard the mumblings of prayer.

The graveyard with its two high cypresses had more dignity than the building to which it pertained; but though small and box-like, its windows were large, and the whole interior was permeated with light. A single pane stood open to let in air.

Jane advanced and setting her face to the aperture looked in.

The building held some twenty or thirty persons all told. They sat on narrow benches, and over against them on a low platform guarded by a rail stood one who prayed.

His hands were clasped upon his breast, his head was raised, his eyes were fast shut. Thus he alone of the whole congregation was unconscious of the disturbing presence.

Wishing to hear his words Jane had put in her head, and this attempt to join in the congregation's worship from without so disturbed its mood that one of the elders, in the exercise of his authority, waved her away. As this did not succeed, his lips shaped a stentorian whisper: "Get away, woman! get away!"

This Josephan utterance sibilating through the sacred

compound caused the preacher to open astonished eyes, and gaze upon his congregation in painful bewilderment. But nothing scandalous was there except the head of Jane. He stopped short and looked at her; the elder rose, crossed to the window and closed the pane. Jane moved away: the murmur of prayer went on.

Looking back as she passed the porch, she saw on a tablet over the door the words "Primitive Brethren" and a date. Thus had she struck once more the heavenly path set before her in the days of her youth; and this was her welcome.

The next day it rained, then cleared again. Jane began now to know her bearings and the names of the places she passed through: by the end of another day she might almost be in Shadbury. But a wish to revisit old scenes drew her aside. She took the road southward to Ossalbury, and for the mixed blessings she had there received stood to give thanks at the two doors which had once sheltered her. Outside the grocer's shop the name of Marbury no longer showed; that of the institution, however, remained the same: a statue, not hollow but of solid stone, stood over the door bearing a child in its arms. Jane inquired of the portress whether the Mother Superior she had once known still held office, and learned that she had been dead twelve years.

A few yards up the street a heavy dray was at stand-still bearing barrels of ale. To the front stood the carter attending to the toilet of his horse. Jane halted at a little distance to watch.

The carter spat into his palm and lovingly anointed the beast's forelock. Then he plaited and polished it. The horse threw up its head before he had finished. Genially the man raged: "Hold still! hold still! I'll wring your bloody little neck for yer!" Majestically the horse came back to obedience, and its little neck was imperilled no more. With tender care the hairdressing went on; a bit of ribbon finished it.

Jane's heart was all smiles again. "Well, that was worth coming to see, anyhow!" she told herself. The turn

had taken her ten miles out of her way ; and she was now without money and without food.

" I wonder why I can't bring myself to beg ? " she cogitated. " 'Twas in the breaking of bread the Lord said he was to be known. I suppose it's because that takes two, like so many other things."

She separated her heart from pride, looked into the faces that passed, but got no showing. By the end of the day she was weary, and faint for lack of food ; and still she waited for the Lord to show Himself.

Evening set in, and it began to rain hard. She came on a wide stretch of moor with no cover at all, and before she had gone a mile was wet to the skin.

For some while she had been aware of unusual traffic encountered along the road, more than the ordinary returnings from a week-end market ; and this day was not Saturday but Monday. Presently at cross-roads a signboard, naming the next town, reminded her of the fact that she was now approaching a rendezvous of combined cattle-market and fair ; and before long the unusual proportion of inebriated people driving in carts made the thing more evident.

Half-way over the wild she came upon a party of toppers to whom the rather featureless landscape gave more trouble than was kind. The evening dulled by rain was dark before the rise of moon, and here there were no hedges either to support or guide them.

Over occasional prostrate forms she stumbled her way on, very weary and conscious of the discomfort not only of wetness but of mud. By now, also, the shoes were falling from her feet and sharp stones told of it ; yet it was still with a sort of humorous appreciation of being her own trump card that the thought came : " He'll have to give me a showing before long."

For here was a new Jonah, not fleeing from the call but anxiously seeking it ; and the word and the hour had not yet come.

Ahead twinkled the lights of the town ; out of it drifted noises of pot-house revelry and the squealing babble of the fair which rain could not drown.

At the edge of the moor, under the light of the first road-lamp which hung opposite, Jane came on a small stunted building standing solitary with porch flush to the road. Its once whitewashed walls were mildewed and grey: from persistent damp or a shifting of the foundations they had bulged to ark-like form. The windows still held fragments of glass and a few of the upper panes remained intact in their leaden settings. Inside the porch on wrenched hinges hung a rotten door; latch and lock had disappeared.

Seeking a dry shelter from the elements Jane turned in, gave a push to the door and found sanctuary. The door stuck on a heap of rubble and remained open. She stood exploring till her eyes became used to the obscurity, and found herself in a deserted chapel. She sat down to rest.

In this abode, quit of pious uses, an aroma of sanctity remained. Though the benches were removed, a low platform at the farther end still stood two steps up, with a broken hand-rail. An old rust-eaten stove-pipe went up through the roof; two feet from the ground its lower end hung vacuous, the heating apparatus gone. Stacked away in one corner lay some old hurdles, in another a hand-cart with broken wheels, piled up with scrap-iron and barrel-staves. An oblong patch on the plaster of the end wall told where once had hung the tablets of the law.

This place, for all its stained nakedness and spiritual decrepitude, was very like the chapel of Jane's childhood. It had a similar ground-plan and elevation; symbolically also it stood ghostly for the same thing. She could visualize the congregation which Sunday after Sunday had assembled within these walls; she became auditory to their prayers, hymns, preachings, and from the weariness of her body turned to that kindred people, and in the continuity of experience found rest.

Over the rubble in the far corner fell a dim patch of light that grew and took shape. The moon had emerged from cloud. Through the cobwebby and mildewed windows its rays entered, making strange latticed patterns on wall and cornice—a row of battered cages in which things ghostly

seemed to waver and move. Jane saw them with physical eyes only. Her spirit was away, far removed to that old hymn-box of childhood wherein her imagination had lain cabined during its years of growth. She saw again those dull, stupid, yet rather dear faces linked to familiar names. They sat and stared at her now—a little scared, it seemed, lest she should speak or make a sign—their fear of a visitation of the spirit by the mouth of woman strong in them as ever.

So in the spirit, lost to herself and her surroundings, Jane sat and looked at them : and she, who so long since had received the call, but had not yet been given the word, found there in shadowy guise her congregation awaiting her.

Weariness went out of her ; forgetting where she was she began to speak.

The strange effect of her voice in the old derelict chapel was lost upon herself, her consciousness was too far removed : but passers in the road heard it and came to a sudden stop. To them it sounded as uncanny as a voice from the grave ; for years since, because of an evil deed done there which had brought scandal on the community, the chapel had been closed. Now words reached their ears which in that place might not be good to listen to : salvation, new birth, resurrection from the dead, were a few which by their familiarity carried farther than the rest. But even in the use of these there seemed a difference ; something of a new kind was being said : the voice had a cheerful sound.

“ There’s some one preaching in the old chapel ! ” whispered one. Hesitating, a little bit afraid, they pressed nearer and looked in.

At the far end, only partially visible between shadow and light, stood a tall gaunt woman, bare-headed, cloaked in a long shawl. Without motion or gesture, steady and mild of voice, she spoke with an unfaltering flow of words to empty space and bare walls.

Her new-come auditors remained spellbound, only dimly crediting their senses, doubting whether flesh and blood

belonged properly to the spectacle before them. There was something monstrous in this unexplained presence of a preacher—and she a woman—in the ruined chapel, its floor stained with crime, and the victim of that a woman also.

It is told, by those who were among her earliest hearers, that Jane's first sermon lasted two hours. Of all those who entered to hear her none went till the end. When she ceased and came to herself, the chapel was full.

Human need was then sore on her, and found voice to say, "Is there any one here will give me a mouthful of bread?"

A woman came forward, opened her basket, and offered fairing-cakes. "You be a world's wonder!" said a man beside her. "Where have you sprung from?"

"America," replied Jane. "But before that, I used to live in these parts." She told them her name.

These two were husband and wife, decent folk, and even on that occasion sober as others were not. Having broken bread with her they did not let her go.

That night at a neighbouring village Jane slept in a clean bed, for the first time since her return; and during the following week she mended baskets and chairs, for them and for their neighbours. For an exchange the man made her a pair of boots; and Jane was well assured then that they had come together by the Lord's will.

The Saturday night following she spoke from the village green, giving them a new taste of her quality. Seeing a woman stand up to preach, men came out of the 'public' to jeer. Jane scarcely waited for their attack.

"Oh, you be a thirsty lot," said she, "by the look of you; but it ain't for the living waters, else you wouldn't need such red noses to see your ways home by. You've paid the price, and to-morrow you'll be sorry for yourselves: or some of you won't—for maybe you haven't all got the sense. Aye, and there's some of you as has wives; and when you get home they'll take off your trousers for you because you can't do it yourself, and search your pockets to find how little of your week's wages be left. But you'll expect your Sunday dinners all the same."

Finding that she was prepared to make a match of it, her tongue against theirs, one or two tried to put her down with ribald jokes ; for she had given them handle enough.

"Ah, that's right," said Jane encouragingly, "show us what you really are ! You men have got the itch, that's what's the matter with you. There's some as can talk of nothing else : and they think as it's a crown of glory to 'em, seems to me. Well, crowns of glory have to be paid for : but they think as they can be had for the asking, or for the taking without asking. That's where they make the mistake ; and you've got to pity 'em for it. 'Crown o' glory' is what every cock says when it starts crowing ; and of all the foolishhest looking things give me a cock as crows just to show he can crow. Hen's clutter is silly enough to listen to : but she's got an egg to show for it. 'Excuse me !' she says. But a cock—there's no excuse for him, except that he's what he is. You've got to forgive him his noise : it's] part of him, and that's all about it. But if he only knew what a fool he looked, he'd do better ! Was there ever such a silly thing as a camel's hump, if it wasn't there to help him across the desert where grass don't grow ? God didn't put it there for you to sit on—so you needn't think !—any more than he made you for fleas to run on. But it's a notion some have : and they calls it 'Providence'."

Thus she turned the laugh against them. Some of them went, others stayed : as long as Jane would speak there were people to hear.

On the Sunday evening, by suasion of her friend the cobbler, the Methodist chapel opened its doors to her.

Crowds came to hear and the doors had to stand open for the many who must remain outside. Even those who could not hear what she said declared that she was a wonderful preacher. They listened, looking in through door and window, with the eye of faith ; and if the spirit of the Lord had truly descended upon Jane, a spirit of eager credulity had also descended upon the congregations which came to listen to her.

It often comes to pass in dull lives that people, without

knowing it, are ripe for something to happen. And so when the thing that happened was a woman preacher newly sprung from America, the fame of her went forth swiftly through all those parts.

Three days later her voice was heard in Shadbury market-place. There she was recognized, and word of it went to Mutton-in-the-Marsh.

On the following Sunday Mutton Chapel got its taste of her. Jane sat in her accustomed place, and minister and people were well aware. The Primitives did not approve of this new light emanating from them; Paul was the rock on which their church was founded, and the silence of women in the assembly was a tenet they would not willingly let go. So when the ministering elder saw that he had Jane sitting under him, he made haste to improve the occasion and nip heresy in the bud. In the very first sentence of his discourse he let his intention be seen, and with the sharp sword of the spirit stood forth to do battle for the faith. "Brethren," he said, "my subject to-day is woman." And already the tone of his voice told what he thought of her. Not that he was unprepared to give Adam's rib her due; but rib she was, and rib she must remain. He rehearsed the Scriptures; showed how sin had come far less by Adam than by Eve, resalted the memory of Lot's wife, compared the incredulity of Sarah with the faith of Abraham, blamed Rebecca and forgave Jacob, held up Ruth for a pattern among widows and Esther among wives, threw Jezebel to the dogs, taking with keen appetite his spiritual share in the crumbs that fell. There was not much left of woman when he had done with her. Once off the beaten track she became his prey: her only course of safety lay in self-repression, obedience, submission to authority, long hair for a glory, and silence in the assembly. "Holy Scripture," he went on (he was speaking, then, of public affairs and the world of politics)—"Holy Scripture, we find, takes little account of women. In one place we read, 'There were in that city five thousand SOULS'"—he gave the word its full weight and paused on it; then his voice went small—"besides women and children." So,

to any who had spiritual vision, he made apparent by tone and gesture the exceeding littleness of that adjunct of the human race whose virtues must not outstep the limits of the home ; and having in the course of an hour's delivery bruised woman's heel to a jelly, very satisfied with himself he sat down.

In the accustomed pause, given for reflection on the words just heard, there was a faint stir. Nervous members of the congregation turned their heads and saw Jane standing upon her feet.

She stood, and she did not speak, and they all looked at her. The presiding elder rose to give out a hymn.

"The word of the Lord has come to me," said Jane.

"You must be silent, sister," said the presiding elder sternly.

"It's His mouth you must shut, not mine," said Jane.

At this rank blasphemy three holy men rose, having been coached thereto beforehand, and approached the disturbing element. "Sister," said the preacher, "you must go out."

Jane quitted her place. "If the living won't hear me," said she, "I must speak to the dead." She moved quickly down the gangway : the door was eagerly opened, she passed out.

The preacher's voice called the congregation back to prayer, for his mind was, since this thing had come in their midst, to improve the occasion yet more.

But hardly had he begun when Jane's voice was heard without. An elder rose, and as though carrying with him the atmosphere of prayer he was forced to quit, skurried down the aisle with bent knees.

He found Jane standing beyond the chapel boundaries, gazing toward the assemblage of gravestones. A low hedge intervened ; she was preaching across it to the dead.

The elder waved a forbidding hand. "Woman, be off !" he cried.

Jane became eloquent.

"Open your deaf ears, rise out of your graves, come up root and branch !"

The elder, shocked at her noise, came forward like a

second Moses to stay the plague and stand between living and dead. Throwing up his arms at her, he looked like a boy scaring birds.

"Ye sparrow!" cried Jane.

He fled scared to the porch, stood looking at her for a moment, listening to the volubility he could not quell, then doubled back into the chapel to fetch aid.

But those within needed aid as much as he; prayer wavered upon its knees. "O Lord, hear us!" cried the presiding elder, but for the hearing of Jane could not get on.

"She won't go!" came the agonized whisper of the foiled emissary. Another blast from without, and he ran back again. Two others joined him. The heads of the congregation began to be turned.

"O Lord, hear us!" supplicated the preacher, "hear us, hear us!" He strove desperately, but was losing ground; for lo, his congregation was melting away from him.

"O Lord, shut the mouth of the lion, and let the bones of the wicked be broken! O Lord, let our ears be open to Thy word only!"

"Ye nest of deaf adders!" came the voice of Jane.

This was not to be borne; and as flesh and blood cannot be in two places at a time, choice had to be made. The chapel emptied.

When the minister himself went forth, Jane was answering him. "There was five thousand souls in that city, was there? Well, you can put walls round 'em, but to the voice of one crying in the wilderness they all come running out. 'Souls'? You can read it that way if you like; eh, but there's another! P'raps all the women and children had got souls without talking about it; and then he'd got to see how many souls the men. Five thousand? How do you know there wasn't another five thousand as hadn't souls? You make the Bible stand on its head when you want to have your own wicked way with it."

The crowd stood very still; they were so much astonished at what Jane was saying now that they wanted to hear what she would say next. Jane turned from the teacher to the taught and with her eyes she held them.

“Here have you all been listening to these men elders of yours, week after week all your lives—letting ’em eat out your brains for you. Now you are going to hear one woman : and what’s she got to say ? I’ll tell you that presently : I’ll give you a bit of Scripture first. There was a man once—you’ve been hearing about him—who’d got two names : he wasn’t always a reformed character. Abram he was called first. And the Lord had promised him life and covered him with blessing ; but he didn’t believe what the Lord told him, else he wouldn’t have been afraid. He had a wife, who was so fair he was afraid to own her. Like folk here in this chapel, he called her his sister, and told her to hold her tongue ; and having silenced all the truth out of her—‘My soul shall live because of *thee*,’ says he. (There’s ‘soul’ for you again !) Well, it didn’t work. His ‘soul’ drove his wife into adultery—for all he cared : till the other man found out and told him to clear. So he went. But he’d feathered his nest first, him and his ‘soul,’ with the reward of his sin ; and he went out of that land a rich man. No wonder he wanted to change his name after doing a thing like that ! Well, why am I telling you about him ? He hadn’t any children then—not by his wife : and presently they got old and stale. But when they’d both come to a hundred, she and him, one was promised to ’em. And that was a funny thing to happen, that was—though it come by the word of the Lord—two old people of a hundred to have a child ! And what did Sarah his wife say about it ? Sarah showed her sense : she laughed when she didn’t believe it, and she went on laughing when she did. ‘God hath made me to laugh,’ says she, ‘so that all that hear will laugh with me !’ ‘Laugh,’ she says, ‘because the word of the Lord has come true.’

“Well, this chapel isn’t a hundred years old yet, but it’s had a child to-day such as it never had before—and by a woman. For it hath sounded the voice of joy : God hath made me to laugh ! and ye all come out to me like the first-born of a new land.

“Laugh at yourselves ! Aye, I mean it. Laugh !

Unbutton your collars to it ; take off them black coats ! Say : Lord, what fools we've all been !

“ Look up to the blue overhead, and the white clouds, and the sun : what's that but laughter ? Look at the raindrops a-shining on the leaves, see how they laugh ! Look how the wind moves 'em. Hark, can't you hear the sound of the world, how it's filled with the Lord's goodness. When you come nigh unto Him can you only croak ? Will you be stiff-necked people ? Will ye not hear the Lord's message when I tell you to laugh ? How are the saints to rejoice in their beds if they won't laugh ? How are ye to make a cheerful noise unto the God of Jacob if your lips won't even smile over it ? Come, come : laugh ! Why can't you laugh ? ”

A curious seizure fell upon that listening crowd. They laughed, and did not cease laughing ; they laughed till their bodies ached and their tears ran down.

It was not the Lord's word only that had come to Jane ; she had got His congregation also.

CHAPTER II

FIRSTLINGS OF THE FOLD

JANE'S tendency to make her hearers laugh accompanied her through all her missionary days ; but the irresistible impulse to do so as a sign of the outpouring of grace became prevalent only in that locality, not spreading farther but awaiting her return.

In those early days when she first found voice to speak, a swift cry of her went up and down the land ; and far and near, congregations clamoured to hear her. A woman preacher, though not entirely a new thing, was far rarer then than she is now ; many went to hear, scornful and incredulous, but stayed to be impressed. Opinions were divided about her, but no one could be quite indifferent. She spoke as one having a sort of home-made authority, and the word came from her with power.

Yet no one could say, when questioned, what her doctrine had been. "She has a way with her," said one : "she gives you a joyful heart."

As she went from place to place chapels opened their doors to her, and crowds flocked to hear. For a short while she seemed to believe that her message had only once to be given for men's eyes to be turned to the light which was already theirs ; and in this faith she let herself be drawn to large centres and her voice be heard not by hundreds but by thousands. Yet even then she would only go on foot from place to place, speaking at villages by the way, and her dates were seldom fixed with any certainty : people had to take their chance of her. "If folk need to hear me," she said to those who tried to bind her by calendar days, "the Lord will bring us together in His own

good time ; but if you put me on to a puffer, my head goes." She only travelled upon an English railroad once in her life, and that before her mission had been started.

No doubt she brought profit to the connexions for which she spoke, but she would take no payment. If at any given place the shoes wore off her feet, she asked for others to replace them ; but had they not been forthcoming would have gone barefoot. When circumstances were at their hardest her spirits always rose, for it was certain then that " the Lord's showing " must be at hand.

At this time, by all accounts, she still used the conventional phrases of her upbringing ; and what beauty of form lay in her utterances must have come largely from her intimate knowledge of the Scriptures. But presently, as she grew sure of her ground—found, that is to say, that before a congregation of hearers words never failed her—she began to say things which had not the character of quotation—some things which, in the estimation of many who had first heard her with favour, had no warrant of Scripture behind them.

This ' saying of things ' became more frequent : sects and congregations began to draw away. The most representative organ of Nonconformity, which had once given her a side-long welcome—holding out half a hand—declared her to be unsound on the two crucial points of regeneration and redemption.

More weighty and general was the charge of irreverence. Too often, by her discourses, she betrayed her audiences to laughter. " She belongs rather to the music-hall than to the pulpit, I think," a shocked minister, from whose chapel she had banished decorum, was heard to affirm. And as this accompaniment of laughter increased, so her circuit became restricted.

By the third year of Jane's travelling ministry, the call for her services from the Free Church connexions had almost ended : her gifts were admitted by those who heard her, but her matter became suspect.

" You preach a doctrine of the flesh, sister," said a stern presbyter, who had mistakenly accorded her the hospitality

of his pulpit. "For my younger members' sake I shall have to undo it again." He shook his head at her. "You don't look at things in the spiritual way ; you don't preach Paul as he ought to be preached." He quoted that high authority for the eternal conflict of flesh and spirit : Jane in her teaching had not properly divided them.

"I've got to see God in the flesh," Jane affirmed. "He put eyes into my head not out of 'em. People as squints, and looks down their noses—of course the flesh gets in *their* way. There's men, I 'm told, in the East sits with eyes so down they fancy they can see Heaven in a starved stomach ! "

This crude version of the austerities of fakir sedentarists dealt a sharper shock to her hearer's mind : coming from a woman it was indelicate.

"As for what Paul says," she went on, "unless it's to tell us that the thing he complains about is a mistake what's got to be cured, I don't see the meaning in it. The sooner a man can teach his spirit to leave off lusting against his flesh, the sooner he'll be in good health : and it's the same t'other way about."

Whereat her brother minister threw up hands of horror, and wished thenceforth to have done with her.

He parted from her stiffly, and wrote to warn the heads of his connexion against having such a woman to preach for them.

"There's an engine of destruction for you !" mused Jane quaintly as they parted—"though he means well ! And now he'll go turning the Word inside out to them poor souls as sits under him, making 'em forget the happy day we had together."

Thus as she went through the country her labours, more often than not, were wiped out for her ; and the more she gave her hearers a happy time, the more were they likely on subsequent occasions to be taken in hand by others and taught better. Chapel was no place for laughter ; and there were times when Jane made laughter ring loud.

"It's funny, isn't it ? " she said once, in commentary on a passage which she had just read ; "you never hear of

God laughing joyous as though a thing had pleased Him : only 'scornful' is what you hear told in Scripture. But it's a poor notion to think He can only laugh one way and not the other. It's simple enough if folk only had sense to see. There's truths as haven't never got 'emselfes set down in Scripture : yes, and there's some better truths been left out than what have got 'emselfes put in ! That shocks you, does it ? But I can give you chapter and verse for it, straight—' Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared.' But that don't mean they *can't* enter : God didn't leave off His goings on when Paul died. Some seems to think He did. ' Things He hath prepared ' : isn't laughter one of 'em ? Not the poor sort of laughter we do to scrape along with. But when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy—there was laughter then of the right sort. Pity it seems to keep it rested the seventh day, and not to go on in men's hearts then—same as all the other days of the week ! ”

When calls to preach no longer came to divert her course this way and that, Jane's feet reverted naturally to her own district. She came bringing with her a big reputation of a kind, but less in the way of recommendations. Henceforth chapels stood closed to her ; and for a time she spoke only in the open air. In the market-places of country towns large crowds gathered to await her coming, sometimes with hostile intent. For now, as on previous visits, that odd local phenomenon which had greeted her first utterance in her own native village reappeared ; and when Jane preached of laughter and mirth, a mysterious working of the spirit took hold of people in the crowd ; and becoming vessels of grace they laughed till they fell down.

Somebody asked Jane whether truly she intended to make folk mad. “ Oh, they'll get over it,” she said : “ it's just a bit of excitement, that's all.”

By the time she had drawn her community about her this was true ; but the recurring symptom had already given the movement its popularly accepted name ; and

when her first congregation found a centre and a habitat of its own, Jane became known as the Mother of 'the Jokers.'

This was at Ipsley, the chief town of the district where, as she gathered her following, local opposition ran high. And it was for the defence not of herself but of her flock that she drew them together into a social bond, and started on the shaping of the communal and co-operative system which in the following decade formed the material basis of their life.

The thing only came about gradually. But as her family grew, Jane ceased to go far afield. Here was something to her hand more definitely constructive and organic than travelling mission work. Her material was very ordinary, often foolish and difficult in its ways, but she would not select. To have done so would have been to avoid the test by which her work was to be proved. For Jane's great and fundamental heresy was that she believed human nature to be good if only right of way could be found for it. This it was her motherly duty to provide.

At her first preaching in Ipsley market-place she had a curious encounter which in a way pleased her. Up to the outskirts of the crowd she saw an old and very fat lady being wheeled in a bath-chair; and when the meeting was over the chairman came across as messenger and claimed her attention.

It was Mrs. Marbury, whose slow suety voice then greeted her, calling her Jane. "I just wanted to speak to you," she said. "I knew it must be you, soon as ever I heard your voice: and your face too—you haven't changed much. But me I suppose you wouldn't ever have known?"

"Well, I don't know: you've kept your figure," said Jane kindly.

"That's because I can't get about."

Jane accompanied her out of the crowd. Mrs. Marbury informed her that she now lived in Ipsley, comfortable enough in her circumstances but quite alone. "They've all left me, one way or another," she complained. "Minnie and Jessie are married and have got children: Matilda keeps a school."

"Does she do that, now!" said Jane, rather amused.

"She turned out the cleverest of the lot," Mrs. Marbury explained. She paused for a moment, then added in a colourless tone, "Wally's dead. He was a great disappointment to us."

Jane forbore to inquire, and the other went on:

"He never entered the ministry after all. He married a publican's daughter instead, and went into the Trade. I never quite got to the rights of it. There was something Matilda knew, but she wouldn't tell me. She'd a sort of hold over him: he was afraid of her, the way she used to tease him. I remember his next birthday after you left us, Matilda gave him a packet of sugar or something done up in pink paper just as if he was a baby. And Wally, he just sat down and cried—cried like a child, he did. He was getting ready to go up for his training then, but that very same day he goes out and gets himself engaged to be married; and of course then it was all over."

Perhaps Jane saw more in this narrative than her informant. One satisfactory thing at least she gathered from it—Matilda had left off telling tales.

Mrs. Marbury said, "It's strange my meeting you, Jane, after all these years; and to find you laughing still. You didn't do it, I know you didn't do it. In a sort of way I knew it even then, but I wouldn't let myself. I was afraid to. And you got the character all right that I gave you? Yes, I always remembered how you sat there on the bed laughing: in a sort of way it's haunted me ever since. Mr. Wally? Oh, he's been dead these seven years, and poor Mr. Marbury went two years after. We came out of the business and left Ossalbury when he died, as there was nobody to take it on; and I've been here ever since. I've heard tell of you often; but your name being different I never knew it was my Jane till now."

They parted to meet again. When Jane found a roof to speak under, Mrs. Marbury came to her meetings, sat there in her wheeled chair and found that they did her good. And when a little later money was needed for communal necessities, Jane's back wages came to her with something

over by way of interest, also for personal wear an old Paisley shawl, which out of kind remembrance Jane wore for many years after. Mrs. Marbury was then her most respectable connexion (indeed almost her only one) with the classes above. "I'd like to come and join you," she said—"but there!" The divisions of life were too strong, and she belonged to her own class.

Nevertheless when the great final division drew near, she sent for Jane to come and pray with her, and clinging to her with still fat but very flabby hands, asked whether she was quite sure that the Lord was kind, since the religion to which outwardly she had conformed through life had left a doubt of it.

Jane then saw the highly efficient Matilda, punctual to the call of duty now that something definite was going to happen. And when they met and shook hands Matilda gave Jane an appreciative look; and they talked of old days, and Wally, and the shop, and how Jane nursed them through the measles: and through it all Matilda remained a reformed character and told no tales. That let Jane know, more than anything else, that Matilda respected her.

All this, however, is a digression into personal history, and in point of time an anticipation of events through which Jane had now to find a way.

Two great interests were up against her: the Church and the Trade; while Nonconformity, regenerate, and redeemed on more orthodox lines than those preached by Jane, was standing aside. Jane's followers—those of the working class—were receiving dismissal from their employ, and those who had trades of their own were being deprived of custom. The dispersal of her little flock was clearly the thing aimed for. Ipsley had no use for the Jokers, and was doing its best to be rid of them.

For the first few months, after they had formed into a body, the Jokers had met, much to Jane's satisfaction, in a carpenter's shop belonging to Reuben Bryce, one of her first converts. Jane lodged with the family, and showed, greatly to Reuben's surprise, that she knew how to make

window-frames, doors, and other things appertaining to houses. She was worth her keep to him ; and when working hours were over the shop was handy for week-day meetings. There, on Sundays also, by dint of a little clearance, they were able to hold services.

Presently Reuben's business began to suffer ; jobs which had been offered were withdrawn ; trade diminished, and he had six children to think of. It might then have gone hard with him, for he was an unyielding character ; but by a chance lucky for him, some wooden sheds along the river wharves caught fire, the conflagration spread, much woodwork was destroyed, and in the local shortage of labour that ensued trade came back to him.

Nevertheless it was a warning ; and other signs were not lacking. Some of Jane's flock were forced to quit the town and seek work elsewhere. Here and there in outlying districts arms were open to receive them, for Jane had a holding in the locality. Thus she did not quite lose them.

But she saw what was ahead : if she succeeded in her work opposition was not likely to diminish. She looked for the Lord's showing, and it came to her. She determined to build up a co-operative community.

Whatever the brains of her following might be, industrially she had good material to her hand ; and she reckoned that if she could once demonstrate a self-supporting independence, at the point where her community's life centred, opposition would soon wear out. For if the spirit of persecution is to enjoy itself it must succeed.

Questing around for premises, Jane found and secured, through other hands than her own, an old auction-room and warehouse, rather derelict.

It stood in a bad quarter next to a public-house—one of many in the same street—named the " Ram's Head." The choice was Hobson's, but it looked provocative, and was so reckoned when the character of the new tenants became known.

For the first year of their occupancy Bloomers' Lane gave the Jokers a hard time. It broke windows, slung mud, rolled them in gutters, and made two separate attempts

to burn them out. Yet every Sunday their meeting was full to overflowing, and the spirit of joy abounded. Jane was drawing converts—not so much to her doctrine as to the discovery that to be a Joker made a man feel well. But it also frequently got him his dismissal, or lost him a job. Before winter she had fifteen out-of-works to care for, and more were to come.

In the upper story of the old auction-room Jane rigged up her workshops. Five miles out she got a piece of land, put some of her workers to live there in huts, and had them home each week-end for the refreshment of their souls. Contributions in food and clothing came to them from those of the faithful who remained employed. Mother Jane instituted the common meal, making it a part of the service; and the Church parsons, who had been responsible for some of the dismissals, were greatly scandalized by the profanity of it.

Jane was now living on the premises, and some of her poorer workpeople were with her. Directing her industries toward the three essentials, food, shelter, and clothing, she found them in life from day to day; but for a month the fighting line who held the fort with her had little besides bread to live on—that and the Sunday meal, which (because it contained meat also) was looked on by outsiders as an irreverent masquerade. Had they but kept it down to the starvation point which was intended for them, it would have been passed as harmless.

“The Devil is always making the mistake of trying to serve God out,” said Jane, when that first tussle with the powers of darkness was occupying all her energies.

“And God serves *him* out,” proposed one of her followers, seeking to put the cap to her wisdom.

“God don’t never serve any one out,” replied Jane; “He only serves him right. There’s all the difference.” And when the phrase ‘serve him right’ came to be heard from her lips without any revengeful meaning, it took on a world of difference to those who understood.

A trumped-up charge was brought against one of Jane’s followers for stealing firewood, and he went to prison for it.

He had gathered wind-falls on a trolley from a private road believing that it was public; there was no concealment in the matter.

Jane's concern was for the hard heart of the landowner who had brought the charge. "How shall we serve him right?" she inquired of her followers.

Their answers showed that they still required teaching. Jane prayed powerfully for the amendment of their wits, and asked the Lord to give them a showing.

He delayed it so long that the man originally concerned was out of prison in time to take part in the demonstration. He himself brought word of it.

A party of Jokers coming back from field labour met one of the unjust man's carts bearing wood, and the horse gone lame. "This'll please Mother Jane, I reckon," said I; "and we took th'orse out of the cart, and we brought the load in for 'un. Carter know'd who we was too."

"Did you wait?" said Jane, a little apprehensive.

"No, we just come away."

"Ah!" her breath went out in exultation.

"That was the Lord's showing, that was!" she said. "That served 'un right!"

The world did not give up its hold on Jane's converts without a struggle. In her first gathering were men, young and old, who had not wholly subdued their taste for liquor; and as Jane required no vows or pledges from those who accepted the mildness of her yoke, there were incidental backslidings. Now and then sheep with the staggers came back to be folded at late hours when doors were supposed to be shut; sometimes did not come back at all.

The lifting of Jane's sheep was a game well recognized by the jovial fraternity who, sceptical of unassisted nature, require to be filled with strong liquor before they can become good fellows; and the 'Ram's Head,' placed so conveniently near to the door of Jane's fold, drew many aside to shady ends when their day's work was over.

This assault upon her weak ones the Mother did not take lying down. When word came to her of these rapes and

kidnappings (and as often as not it was the 'Ram's Head' itself which vaingloriously published the news) she would go forth and hold a meeting at its doors, and sometimes, if the spirit of the Lord favoured her, would do a damage to its trade. For she had the terrific power of amusing people, of turning the laugh, of trouncing a man so that his neighbours took joy in him as a newly discovered character. She gave names that stuck; and some, bearing their labels of frailty, retained them even when they became converts, carrying them to glory as trophies of victory over a bad past.

A time came when the prosperity of the community had so advanced that it was able on Saturday nights to keep open house, and give refreshment free, of a non-alcoholic kind, to all who sought hospitality. And because those who came were not preached at the thing succeeded.

The 'Ram's Head' regarded this as so serious that on one occasion, gathering its forces, it endeavoured to drink her out, but did not succeed. Jane, seeing what was afoot, watered the tea with a firm hand, making sheep and goats suffer alike; and the forces of alcohol retired beaten.

"Toppers haven't got heads for tea," she remarked, and gave her genuine casuals a good cup to wind up with.

It was after this that she got her windows toward the street more thoroughly broken than ever before. The next night she and her following invaded the 'Ram's Head' in force, bought a minimum of refreshment, spent the maximum amount of time in consuming it, and so conducted conversation that the social atmosphere of the bar became changed and uplifted to latitudes that beery ones could not breathe in. Before half an hour was over some of the most profitable habitués had fled dismayed to rival establishments, and the publican was of an almost equal mind for assault or for surrender.

But outside his door stood a patient mendicant Joker, bearing a hat for the restoration fund—would stand there daily, Jane hinted, till the breakage of her windows was made good to her. That decided him; and without a

second visitation the hat received the satisfaction it required.

The triumph of her following caused Jane to doubt whether she had done well in the matter. "It's done him some good, maybe," she observed, "but it's done us some harm." She bought the glass out of the general fund, mended her own windows, and returned the enforced contribution.

From that day on her windows remained unbroken. "It was the Lord's showing," she said.

CHAPTER III

‘REJOICE GREATLY’

JANE became known to her enemies as ‘the Woman.’ The appellation pleased her; it was embracing. “If that’s the worst they can say of me,” she remarked, “I haven’t done so bad.” And yet it was the charge which in that Victorian age meant most, going down to the very root of things. The fundamental indecency of the Joker community was that it had been founded by a woman.

It was on that count more than any other that she had the Church against her as well as the Trade; for when a woman interferes in matters either of religion or drink, she is interfering with the prerogatives of the male. It was very unfair of Jane that in setting herself simultaneously against both these vested interests she caused them to go hand in hand.

‘The Woman’s’ first tussle had been with the licensed victuallers, and so far as securing herself a footing was concerned, she had beaten them. Her second tussle was with the Church.

Jane held her premises on no more than a yearly tenancy; her community was growing. Undeterred by dismissals she had now a congregation of over three hundred; ten families turned out of employ were housing under the same roof with her, and more were coming. There would presently not be room enough.

Jane went to house-agents: they shook their heads at her and shut their books. These were not for her inspection. “We want quiet respectable people,” they told her. “We don’t like noise.”

Jane’s family did not make more noise than others—a

good deal less than some ; but they made noises of a different kind. They made religious noises, they sang hymns in the street, they sang as they went to work, they sang while they were at work. They practised a new science, inductive by physical and vocal exercises of the cheerful mind ; they hummed, they waved their arms, and they laughed when they ought not to laugh.

“ People who turn religion into a mockery,” was the condemnation pronounced against them from the parish pulpit. And largely because of it, where Church influence extended, working families were being turned into the street.

But Jane did not doubt, for her whole flock any more than for herself, that ‘ the Lord’s showing ’ would come. “ He’ll get us into a tight hole first,” she said, “ and then He’ll make us free of it. That’s His way.” And if she had said, “ That is His little joke,” she could not have shown more plainly her humorous appreciation of the trials by which Heaven tested her. It was precisely the same teaching as has been held by saints all down the ages ; the only difference was that Jane smiled about it, believing that if it gave pleasure and satisfaction up above, it should give equal pleasure and satisfaction down below. If the divine Joke was to operate rightly, man must share in it.

“ There’s some folk,” commented Jane, “ spends all their time calling ’emself miserable sinners, and lying down, and asking God to walk on ’em ! What good does that do Him, I’d like to know ? He wants you to stand up to Him.” This saying, when reported in orthodox circles, gave great offence ; and another batch of dismissals for the poorer of Jane’s flock was the result. Thus by the freedom of her tongue she got her following into trouble.

Before she had been two-years in occupancy of the premises in Bloomers’ Lane, she received a quarter’s notice to quit. She offered a raised rental but was told that she must go.

At that time the community was making its own boots, clothes, bread, candles, soap, jam, and many other house-

hold commodities. It was its own carpenter and tin-smith, and was getting produce from its own land. Its small improvised workshops hummed with life, it was paying its own way ; and as far as the opposition of its own class was concerned, it had beaten it. This new attack was from the capitalist and landowner.

Jane called her flock together and told them of what hung over them. “Rejoice greatly!” she said. “Now we are going to have the Lord’s showing.”

They had not to wait two days for it. A house-agent, one of those who had previously rejected her tenancy, paid Jane a visit and made her an offer.

He was a slight wiry man, half trained in the law, though not qualified. In addition to his agency he had other activities, was an auctioneer, and in a small way a speculative builder : his name was Chaffwax.

Quite early one morning he trotted into Jane’s premises, and with neck askew, to give accent to the interrogation, said, “You want a house ? ”

“Yes, please the Lord, I do,” said Jane.

“I’ve got one on hand that won’t let.”

“The other day you said you hadn’t one.”

“I hadn’t : I’ve just bought it, at least I’m going to.”

“Ah ? ” Here was the Lord’s showing : and in the light of Heaven Jane’s business eye grew blind.

“There’s a mortgage on it,” he explained : “if you’ll pay the mortgage interest you can have it.”

“Where is it ? ”

“Fox Hall.” He named an estate lying a mile outside the town, and, for Jane’s workers who trudged daily afield, in the right direction.

“What, the lunatic asylum as was ? Folk say it’s haunted.”

“That’s so ! I’ve taken it for the land. Presently I’m going to build there. If you’ll take a house reputed to be haunted, and pay the mortgage, there it is for you.”

Jane’s heart was greatly uplifted.

“How many’ll it take in ? ”

“Fifty, I shouldn’t wonder, living close.”

“Can I put up sheds?”

“You can have all the ground back from the house. It’s only the road frontage I want yet.”

“How long?”

“The ground?—Oh, three years I dare say. I’ve only a small capital to work with. It’s worth my while if I can just get the mortgage paid.” He told her the amount: it was not large for the accommodation.

“Why did you come to me?” asked Jane.

“I tell you frankly, there’s nobody else would take it: I thought you would. The house had got a bad name.”

“It has that,” said Jane, “I know. Well, I’ll think about it.”

Its name was so bad that she had her doubts whether even she could persuade her followers to go into it. For herself she had no doubt whatever: this was the Lord’s showing.

When Jane put the matter before them, the Jokers were of a divided mind. The place had ugly tales attached to it, and ugly things had certainly happened there; private lunatic asylums were not then what they are now. Since it had closed under a cloud some years previously its continued lack of an occupant had enhanced its bad reputation; at the dead of night mysterious lights were seen in the upper chambers and cries heard. For a time there had been a caretaker, but now no caretaker would stay; and there were rooms of which it was definitely said that they could not be slept in.

All this was regarded by Jane as good matter for the exercise of faith. “If the living can’t do better than ghosts,” she said, “they are a poor lot.” And of course in the end she got her way.

No doubt there was courage in numbers—at that time thirty-five were requiring to be housed; there was also the excitement and bustle of clearing out and reinstalling the workshops in the new premises. When everybody was working at top speed, nerves, for lack of consideration, remained steady.

Jane caused a large board to be painted with blue

letters on white, bearing the words ‘Rejoice Greatly.’ This was set up over the door of the new establishment, and without having been actually intended became the name for it. They could not have chosen a better one to dispell the gloom which had previously hung about it.

The house was a large square building covered with ivy, and standing back among trees at the end of a long drive was well shut off from the road. The windows were of a sham Gothic with cast-iron mouldings, perpetrated in the late Georgian period, a sad forecast of the ‘romantic’ revival which was to follow. Attached to the house back and front were two acres of ground, of which (barring the strip of frontage) Jane and her community had present disposal. In the first six months they erected a score of workshops, turned the stables into a schoolroom and meeting-house, and set up huts in the grounds for the overflow of their population. These were the days of their prosperity: before the end of the year the place had eighty inhabitants; and their life, though simple, was free from hardship or austerity.

But as individuals they possessed nothing and shared all things in common. What money they received they paid into a common fund; and they had no bankers. The money-box stood on the Table of Testimony, and was not locked. The locking of any door, or the retention of any material privilege unshared by all, would have been a denial of the life which they sought to establish.

As that was their practice in things material, it followed naturally that the outside world charged them with ‘free love’ and promiscuity. They called each other ‘brother’ and ‘sister,’ or where the difference of age was marked ‘father’ and ‘mother.’ Thus in the ordinary interchange of speech the young had many fathers, and the fathers many children; and if a wife spoke of her husband as ‘Brother James’—much as wives outside the fellowship would speak politely of their husbands as ‘Mr. Jones’—the scandalous imputation was the better established and went the more briskly upon its round.

Of the doings of Jane and her community, in their first

occupancy of the old house with its shady character, and the encampment which they set up round it, many local legends survive but are hard to verify. For the most part they are the hearsay of tongues more bent on rude detraction than on a strict rendering of fact. It may or may not be true that, before entering into possession, 'the Woman' and her host compassed the walls about seven times, and blew trumpets at the windows as a warning to the ghosts within; for Jane regarded as profitable any device that gave cheer and confidence to her following, and would go lengths to secure it; nor were instruments of music the only kind which she thought fit to play on.

Possibly she herself may have encouraged, by allowance, some of the tales which went the round; her aim was to get the ghosts well and truly laid, so that thereafter they should rise no more; and if mere uneventful waking and sleeping would not do it, chapter and verse of a spiritual defeat were the better way.

In rural places about Ipsley a few scattered survivors are still to be found of those who once walked with Jane in the beauty of holiness, but who, for one cause or another, through doubt, hardship, or persecution, fell away from her. A little shamefacedly, but loyally still, they speak of her as one whose word kindled a light in their souls; and if the blame of their defection is not to be at their own doors they do not lay it at hers.

From one of these comes this story of Jane's ghost-laying powers: for that the house was a well-haunted one everybody knew, and the infection of it had so spread that scarcely a room was safe. From this account it would seem that Jane went into possession alone, sampling in solitude those tainted chambers wherein her will was that others should rest in peace.

Choosing her room she went to bed in it: at midnight the ghost knocked.

"Come in," said Jane.

The summons was repeated: it flew about, not limiting itself to doors. "I've said 'Come in' once," observed Jane, and attended to that manifestation no more.

Others followed. “Rats!” cried the voice from the bed.

The ghost resenting the implication became importunate, it insisted on the attention which was its due. “Oh, tie a knot in your tail and hang yourself!” protested Jane, and turned over to sleep.

At that off came the bed-clothes. “Well, take ’em if you want ’em!” she conceded, and lay without. Turned forcibly out of bed, she lay with equal cheerfulness on the floor. The ghost trundled her up and down the room like a rolling-pin, but she took no harm and she made no complaint. “I’m used to travelling,” she remarked, and having slept in storm to the tossing of a ship, slept now.

Toward morning the ghost, feeling itself beaten, set up a wail. Instantly Jane woke, attentive to its wants. “What’s the matter with you?” she inquired. “Haven’t you got a home?” The thing went whimpering from corner to corner, but made no articulate reply; and Jane got back into bed. “Be reasonable,” she said, “and I’ll attend to ye!” Thus encouraged the ghost drew near, and with a laying on of ice-cold hands communicated to her the chilly nature of its complaint.

“Cold, are ye?” said Jane: “and I don’t wonder, if you keeps yourself away from the sun.” We get now to the narrator’s own words: “‘Benighted soul,’ says she, ‘why can’t ye come out in daylight like a sensible thing? Is it your complexion or your age as you’re trying to conceal? And anyway, what is it you want? If it’s food I can give it ye: if it’s a roof I ain’t going to turn you out: and if it’s companionship and warmth, you can get into bed along o’ me.’ But oh! you must understand that when Mother Jane said that, she’d made up her mind what kind of a ghost it was—else you mustn’t think!” Having disposed of that moral point the narrator continued:

“‘And if it’s clothes as you want,’ she says, ‘there’s all mine lying on the chair; you can get into them.’ And after that she prayed: oh, three hours she prayed powerful for that ghost! And all the time there wasn’t a wink, nor a blink, nor a whisper, to tell one way or another how the

poor soul was taking it, till outside she hears the chirping of the birds, and morning begun.

“ Well, whether it was the share of a bed or the clothes that did it—or Mother Jane’s cheerfulness of speech, and the sort of way she had of getting round people, I don’t rightly know ; but before a week was out the thing as had been occupying that room ‘ wilted away like a evening primrose ’—that was the Mother’s way of putting it ; and there wasn’t a ruffle of it left then, nor after. She put old Josh Corby, one of our elders, to sleep in it first, and nothing woke *him* ; and after that any of us as liked, and nobody ever the worse. Ah ! she’d a wonderful way with souls, she had ! They’ve got that house for a girl school now, and doing well, so I’m told : and all because of her.”

So the testimony of one witness stands preserved to us ; and who knows that in its essentials the story may not be true ? Jane, bent on her spiritual spring-cleaning, moved on from room to room ; and in her wake the faithful fell into occupancy and were not disturbed. Within three weeks the house, clear of its ill odours, was habitable again, and no vestige of a ghost left.

CHAPTER IV

THE HILL OF DIFFICULTIES

FROM that fresh-laid communion of saints emulations and jealousies were not absent; shining lights from other conventicles had come trailing glory, anxious to be set on candlesticks. Recognizing in the new church a bride adorned for a husband, they wished to stand toward it in the connubial relation and dispose it to their own liking.

Jane was herself aware that her small fold must have some form of cohesion given to it beyond her own personal magnetism; and when request came for the appointment of elders in the congregation, she affirmed cheerfully that it should be so.

“Yes, we’ll have elders,” she said, “and we’ll have youngers as well—and middlings to go between; and they shall all have their turns and their seasons. It’ll be a lesson to us all. You’ll be surprised to find how pleasant the change’ll be, when we elders have got a bit stale in our managing ways, to have the young ones come along on top of us and undo all the things they don’t like. That’ll teach us good manners, that will! Up top you go! We’ll start with the young ones first.” And by choice of the community six of the younger men and women went into office that very day for the ordering of the others.

This was not what the advocates of ministerial eldership had intended, yet in a way it was a fulfilment of their request. One of them departed in dudgeon at this setting-up of youth on a see-saw equality with age; the rest lived chastened lives, and took their turn when it came, with a consciousness that behind them waited the redressing balance. That knowledge gave them younger eyes to see by.

The 'Mother' was no scholar : she took the Scriptures very literally, but with a shrewd eye for her texts applied them to practical ends. When problems troubled her she turned to 'the Book' as her guide : opened it almost at random and let her eye travel till it found something to rest on. "I will make him a ruler among the princes" was the guidance which this method provided in respect of a man whose infirmity of purpose had caused her well-nigh to despair of him. She gave him a post of trust and authority, and he became a reformed character. Simple souls beholding that transformation regarded it as a miraculous performance.

By the guidance of Scripture also, a natural feature of the landscape became elevated into a symbol, and helped Jane through many difficulties. Above the settlement rose a small steep hill, conical and bare ; the house lay almost under its shade, level fields stretched beyond. Thither, for lack of loftier elevations, Jane lifted up her eyes to fetch strength, and on occasion directed to it the feet of her followers when they seemed to need guidance. She taught them that sanity might be found there.

One small instance will serve : two of the community, for reasons important only to themselves, thirsted for each other's blood. Being an ill-matched pair, the fight with fists sought by the one was sedulously avoided by the other. For this reason he went armed, letting his rival know of it ; whenever they encountered out came the knife. Baulked by the pacific intervention of others, the feud infected their brains. One day Jane found them at grips, saw real danger threatening, and sprang between. The man for the fair fight, which he was so sure of winning, regarded himself as the injured party.

Jane did not parley : bidding the armed man wait below, she led the burlier of the two up the Hill of Difficulties. All the way he talked volubly, stating his case. She let him wag on.

The ascent gained, they turned about, and gazing down had a pleasant bird's-eye view of the adversary, faithful to his post, steadfastly eyeing them.

"Shake your fist at him," said Jane.

The deed was done; a shaken fist gave response from below.

"Do it again!" And once more like followed like.

After a third shaking of fists—"He's got his dirty knife out!" complained her companion.

"Spit at him!" said Jane.

The man paused, doubtful whither she was leading him.

"He won't see that," he objected.

"All the better for you: it gives you the pull. Spit away!"

The pause extended. "I wun't," he protested. "You do make I feel a fool."

"So you've got to it, have you?" said Jane. "Kiss your hand to him—he's a fool too."

She signalled the other up to them; he came slowly.

"Bill says he's a fool," she announced; "what are you?"

"I'm only standing for my rights to be let alone," said the new arrival obstinately.

"Well," said Jane, "you can have 'em if you'll pay for 'em. You can't get nothing worth having in this wicked world without paying for it. You've only to let Bill knock you down once, and he'll let you alone for ever after. Won't you, Bill?"

This was not exactly what Bill meant, though it was the end he sought.

"I want to show as I'm the better man," he said with dogged reasonableness.

"So you are, if you only mean flesh and bone," replied Jane. "Any one can see that. If you wasn't, what's he carrying his butcher's knife for?"

"Because he's dirt: that's what he is!"

"Sam," said Jane, "you give me that knife."

He surrendered it obediently. "There!" she pointed: "he ain't dirt now. Be a man, Sam, let him hit yer: it's only once!"

Sam looked at her, bewildered, helpless, imploringly: she had taken his knife off him. Then he braced himself, drew in a breath, tightened his lips and shut his eyes.

Jane steadied her voice to say, "There, Bill, your man's waiting; knock him down!"

Bill faced the situation in dull perplexity, but could not carry on. "Why'd I want to hit a thing like him?" he said at last.

"Why should you?" agreed Jane. "Or him a thing like you? There's no beauty as I see to choose between you. Well? You don't seem so keen after all. Open your eyes, Sam, he ain't going to hurt you."

"But we baint friends!" said Bill vengefully, his moral feelings unappeased.

"No?" She paused a moment. "Now look here! If you won't take your own way, will you take mine?"

Their eyes gave assent. Jane restored to Sam his lost property.

"Just you two exchange knives then! Sam has got the bigger one and knows it; that's where he had the pull of *you*. Men can't help being fools, but they can help being bloody fools. Come on, Samuel, there ain't to be no hewing of Agag to-day."

Thus bidden, Sam made the required sacrifice.

"Now Bill," said Jane, "show yourself the better man! Take Sam on your back and carry him down home; he's feeling faint."

They obeyed as though they had been little children. The community watched their descent from that mount of transfiguration with feelings almost of awe. Surely, for such mothering of grown men to be possible, a walking miracle had come among them!

"And we'll all have jam for tea," said Jane in 'conclusion. "The Devil's done for himself! Sam and Bill have found they can't do without each other."

That was a fact; Sam and Bill became bosom friends.

For always, then and after, Jane had the wit to perceive that simple souls need ritual; and the camp never lacked its daily parable while she was in it.

A painter came one day and sat in a field over against them, plying his brush for long hours earnestly and well. In the foreground of his subject stood a tethered donkey and a

hayrick, with fields and woods and hill lying beyond. Day after day he came, a marvel of patience for remote ends ; they watched him putting small streaks of paint to canvas, and sometimes taking them off again. Thereupon arose in the community a discussion about art, the rights and the wrongs of it : and didn't the Mother say it was a waste of good material intended for better use ?

Jane gave hearing, but no assent. " There's more things wasted here," she remarked, " than them paints and stuff. Why don't you make landscapes of your hearts ? It's what them poor painter fools are after, in their own way ; though tying a donkey by the leg to do a day's work for you ain't much of a showing to my mind. You've only to fill your heart and shut your eyes, and you've got a picture."

The mere word of it set them going on a fresh religious exercise. Planted in rows when work was done, they sat and sunned themselves. And after much filling of hearts and shutting of eyes, truly a contentment sprang from it : the old dreamed dreams and the young saw visions.

These simple followings of her word Jane never rebuked. " If it does them good they'll hold to it," she would say ; " if it don't they'll come out of it." She left it at that, for the way of salvation, as she saw it, was a broad pasture where flocks might graze at will. So long as they had green nourishment they gave little trouble to the directing hand.

After making landscapes of their hearts for a while, the Jokers found spiritual completeness in making landmarks of their bodies. They started—more especially the younger ones—a new exercise of arm-waving, very pleasant and rhythmic to behold. It was a feeling for wings which came at certain times and uplifted them ; and at early morning when the sun was low it took great hold of them, filling their spirits with a sense of happiness which lasted throughout the day.

This exercise, started by the women, before long found favour with the men also, especially with the unmarried ; and when the women stood in the open field behind the camp and waved signals to Heaven, the men in shirt-sleeves

would come out of their huts, stand over against them, and selecting each his heavenly partner would wave signals back to them in a sort of antiphonal order of question and reply, which though saying nothing came to mean much. From this setting to partners a sense of wings rapidly developed, and assiduously practised not only produced a good chest development in both sexes alike but led to marital arrangements—became in fact a regular and recognized preliminary thereto, like the spring dance of the capercailzie.

In the married quarters the wings tended to fold themselves and be at rest ; but they did not cease all at once, and sometimes were assiduously persisted in, with good results to the health, temper, and general efficiency of the practitioners.

Seeing that it made for good spirits the Mother gave the performance her blessing. Those wings provided her at times with a better handle for the management of back-sliders. “Get on with you, you’ve lost your wings!” she would say to mopers. “Be off and find them again!” And they would go obediently, and—likely as not—find them and come back smiling.

Seen by outsiders, this exercise won for the community yet another of its nicknames—‘the Flappers,’ which for a time became locally the most popular of all. ‘Scare-crows’ was a less friendly appellation ; but names mattered little to them in those days, when the divine alchemy was at work free and unhindered in their midst.

Janè never waved arms herself : her own wings working inwardly needed no outward exercise to keep them fit. But she would stand and watch when others stood happily flapping like a row of penguins. “Ah ! you’ll all get to Heaven in time,” she remarked ; “but your wings haven’t outgrown your bodies yet, not by a long way !”

She wanted wings to have a very much larger attachment than human nature had yet given them ; for while she believed that, if God were with him, man lived better in a community than apart, she believed also that no communion of saints was possible which drew the line anywhere between

worship and the well-being of life. So when the community desired a new song that they might sing, Jane wrote this for them :

*Man's a fool ! From all his thievings
God gets left, and God's the leavings.
Bread of life be in the baking :
Man's the meal, and God's the making.
On the fire which hath no dying,
Man's the fat, and God's the frying.*

*When we toil for friend and neighbour,
Giving service, God is labour.
In the joy which cometh after
Honest labour God is laughter.
And when cares have ceased to cumber
Brain and body, God is slumber.*

Choosing a cheerful tune to fit the words, the congregation sang, "Man's a fool!" with great heartiness and conviction. Jane joyed to hear them. "If those as wastes time calling 'emselfes miserable sinners would only shorten it to fools," she remarked, "they'd get a deal nearer home, and do 'emselfes more good. It's the truer word anyway."

But though the Mother loved laughter, believing it a cure for nine-tenths of man's ills, she could be solemn also. One day there fell on the community a shadow of evil so black Jane could not laugh about it. It was the darker being unrevealed : it recurred, and still its origin was not traced.

But Jane's remedy was not to question or search by material ways ; nor was the culprit called on to confess to deeds done in the dark. But at the falling-in of night she called her flock together, and numbered them, and led them to the Lord's showing a way of her own. Solemnly up the Hill of Difficulties they went, Jane leading them, and silently stationed under a moonless heaven of stars, stood out the hours till dawn.

One that was there tells of it. "'Twas the only time I

ever see Mother Jane with tears in her eyes, when she called us in and told us of what was among us. Then she took us up to the hill, and we all waited for the Lord's showing : and nobody wasn't to speak. We'd stood there a whole hour before Mother Jane first said the word : it come so sudden some of us almost cried out. ' Make me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me ! ' That was all she said. Two hours later she said it again ; and then, when we was all standing about ready to drop, she said it a third time. We was all crying then, we couldn't help. But when the light came it showed the granting of her prayer, and the one as hadn't got the right heart had gone. He never come back either : but don't you doubt, if he had Jane would have taken him. For she'd a great faith in her. Aye, there isn't a doubt we did well along of 'er."

CHAPTER V

THE SEED OF THE WORD

JANE had many tussles with her human material, and her guardian eye had ever to be upon the watch. In that fallow soil many follies took quick root, but had, for the most part, only short life allowed them. Now and again there cropped up in the community a slavish element, fain to find plenary inspiration in her alone. This she did her best to discourage.

In one of her followers, especially, the symptom recurred. This was a man named Jacob Mease, by extraction a Plymouth Brother, by election an elder, and by nature a sycophant. A sensuous meekness pervaded his whole character; he walked the easier slopes of virtue with buttered tread, and loved to sit with shut eyes and head softly awag, smiling to himself a smile which to the outside world was intended to mean much. Having come from a community which denies woman a voice, he had all the greater wish to regard Jane as a transcendent exception. That alone would sufficiently explain his conversion. He was not an early convert; by trade an undertaker, he had failed in that sad business, and determining that his sense of humour and his too constant smile had been the cause, he joined himself to Jane's following, prepared if need arose to make coffins for the community. His sister, Mary Anne Mease, being dependent upon her brother, had come with him. Perhaps it was a relief to her also to enter a fold where sheep might bleat as well as rams. Sister Mary Anne had a very hand-to-mouth brain; she worked it hard and was voluble: whenever she opened her mouth to speak thought got ahead of her, and she panted after it in vain.

Jane looking askance at none, accepted these two as she would have accepted anybody. A week after they had joined Jacob told her they had no longer a home, 'Rejoice Greatly' made room for them: they fitted in with the rest and a use was found them, though coffins were called for but seldom. Jacob was ready for any work which did not require him to bend his back or his knees; he was also very good at quoting Scripture. This ensured his election as an elder; and he was ever among the foremost in all religious diversions—would even flap an arm wing-like, now this side now that, when others spread themselves, forbearing only because of the infirmity of age. When meditation became the vogue, he enclosed his heart with shut eyes and beheld paradise.

Ever apprehensive for the extension of spiritual privileges, "Mother Jane," he inquired meekly one day, "mayn't we have visions?"

"Have as many of 'em as you like," replied Jane, "so long as you don't have 'em from indigestion. There was one man I knew always had a vision if he slept on his back; and then he'd nearly holler the house down. It was always the same vision—the Lord coming to Judgment; and you may reckon it a true one; for it was a judgment of sorts—on him, after he'd overeaten, trying to lie so innocent."

She turned away to her work, but presently, as if a thought had struck her, came back. "Which of ye's been having visions?" she inquired.

"I had one three days ago," Brother Jacob confessed in meek wistfulness. "I saw it with my own waking eyes—and you, plain as I'm seeing you now, high uplifted on earth with all the faithful round you, wearing a crown of stars."

"Who was wearing crowns?" inquired Jane.

"You was, Sister."

"And what were you all doing, so high uplifted?"

"We were assisting to put it on, Sister."

"Oh, you were, were you? Then now you can just assist to take it off again. We've all got a right to our visions, and that's mine. Them as wants to make daisy-chains of the stars must wear 'em for themselves."

No further attempts at Jane's coronation occurred after that ; but the incident was typical of a current of thought which tried now and then, through certain representatives, to find utterance. Lowly themselves, the Jokers were not above the temptation of a reflected glory. Their ears were open for any revelation she might have given them ; and a deified Jane would undoubtedly have helped many along the rough earthly path they were called to tread.

No doubt it was as a showing of love that Jane's followers tried to add miracles to her other accomplishments. This imputation of virtue was more difficult to reject than the heavenly crown which she had so resolutely put aside ; for Jane believed little in doctors and much in prayer, and the effect of her magnetic personality on sick people was often remarkable. "Praying's like an open window," she declared ; "it sets up a draught and gives you a change of air. The spirit has got to blow through you where it listeth ; and how can it if a man stays shut in all to himself ? "

But Mother Jane was for the material application as well as for the spiritual, and believed it better for sick people to be carried out of doors (when weather and the nature of their complaint reasonably permitted) even if in the event they died there. She did not take that course against the wish of the sick themselves ; but in some cases it was done against doctor's orders, and perhaps in blind reliance on Jane's word that it would be good for them. Generally it was so, and this only made the doctors the more annoyed. The local press coming to their aid became insistent for the suppression of one social nuisance among the many it condoned ; and when one of Jane's patients died of old age there was a great storm of public feeling.

But in spite of its temptation of Providence the community remained provokingly robust, lived immune through a sharp epidemic of smallpox, refusing the protection of first and second vaccination which sanitary authority sought to impose on it—"Our children don't die," said Jane, "they haven't learnt the way of it."—and during the two years of their tenancy at 'Rejoice Greatly' had a

smaller percentage of deaths than any other institution in the locality could show.

The red-hot zealots of her band put all this down to spiritual powers. Eager for miracle they lived daily expecting it, and saw it before it came. Perhaps, without any boast, Jane had some faith in herself; she seems at least to have accepted the aid which her reputation gave for imposing healthy habits of life which the community might otherwise have kicked at; and her treatment of disease had a haphazard abruptness which would not have passed muster at a coroner's inquest.

When her advice was sought for one lying sick of a quinsy, a string of onions round the neck and a poached egg on the top of the head was the remedy she was reported to have prescribed. "You might do worse," was all she had actually said of it. Applied in good faith, as a revelation coming from Jane, it had the desired effect: the quinsy broke, and the community was loud in its applause.

The miraculous colour given to these happy events did not add to the popularity of Jane's following amongst other religious communities. As the successes of a bone-setter inflame jealousy among the "die-hards" of the medical profession, so did her cures arouse wrath in circles where faith and works were not always on a par; and when Jane went one fine day and preached to a cornfield, unsparing condemnation of her blasphemous presumption found voice in the local pulpits.

The story was true. While the churches were industriously praying right weather for the crops, Jane had gone to give encouragement to the crops themselves. Standing on her hill overlooking a wide prospect of wheat-ears waving in the wind, she gave them a heart-to-heart talking to, which, as it brought cheer to hearers who worked upon the land, probably brought cheer also to the products of their labour.

The corn was then palely ripening, fair to look upon but lacking substance, under a hazy sky that would not rain; and the Mother stood with her community about her, and spoke as her heart showed her. Likely enough, Jane had

never in her life heard tell of that glorious poor little one, St. Francis of Assisi, but something of the Franciscan spirit ran in her blood, and now and again found utterance in her words.

"Aye, you're up, you're up!" she cried. "You're all coming along, and the Lord has got good things in store for you. There's thousands of you and thousands, all working with level heads of your own to make the handful of grain become a heap for the feeding of multitudes; and because you are doing the Lord's will, His joy is in you, His joy—bread for the human soul! See how they stand upright! See how they bend this way and that to the Lord's will! One hasn't got to see the sun to be told whether it shines; one hasn't got to feel the wind to know the way of it. It's all there in yon fields of corn; you can't keep it out! God's light shines on it, God's wind blows on it, God in His time sends rain on it; and it rejoices though it haven't no eyes to see!"

Jane turned to her followers, they were all looking; and though they, like the corn, had not the eyes, they were willing to learn.

"There's a wonderful bit of worship for you!" she went on. "Which of us has ever worshipped God like yon fields of corn? There's uprightness for you, there's looking toward the light, there's patience, there's meekness, there's a holding up of heads and a will to do His word, and a good and a joyful dwelling together of brethren in unity! O hearts of men, be like yon corn! Come, come, sow your hearts in the field, and they shall return to you more abundantly! Ye shall go out with joy, ye shall be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."

The words of Jane's vision were ended: there followed a stir of wings, and for a while her band stood round her flapping their arms skyward; then with hearts greatly uplifted by a preachment which they so little understood, they returned to their communal life and their field labour.

At the right time, and with the right weather to aid, the green turned gold, the wheat-ears were well filled and of that harvest the farmers did not complain.

Jane was not there to see it reaped ; another call had then come to her.

Sometime in the past she had sown seed farther afield than she knew ; and away in the west of England a small community had grown accepting her teaching and seeing the light in the same blithe way, or trying to.

They were only twelve all told ; and till now she knew nothing about them. But report of her own larger settlement had gone abroad, and one day a missive came claiming her spiritual aid that the Lord's work in them might be established.

It was a showing she could not reject ; and it served a double purpose. Heavenly crowns and miracles endanger the souls of men, take from them their integrity. Jane saw that her community relied on her too much, and that parting for a while would be good for them. " I shall have to leave them some day," she told herself : " why not now ? " She saw it as a test good for them to undergo—the Lord's showing of her work in them.

She broke to her followers the news of her plan with some abruptness. " I'm going away," she said ; " I'm tired of you ; I want change of air."

They looked at her in dumb amazement. Only Jacob saw a spiritual parable in her words. " Are you going to be caught up, Sister, caught up into glory ? "

" You've got glory on the brain," Jane told him. It was the same symptom once more, and it showed that she was right.

" But you aren't really tired of us, Mother, are you ? " pleaded one.

" I am ! " affirmed Jane. " You've all been bearing on me too hard, and you've got to cure yourselves. You walk all sideways through it, some of yer, like as if you'd got curved spine."

They took her word for it ; but they did not understand. Then she lifted their spirits for them, and told them of the

call. "I'm coming back," she said, "but I won't tell you the date. If you belong to the Lord you can do without me; and if you don't properly belong He's going to prove you."

Jane's decisions were never followed by pause. She set off the same day, cheerful and confident: it was the better trial for them all. And as her feet tasted English earth in the south-westerly direction, travelling to the fall of light over low hills, it was lovely to think of those she had left behind, trees of her own planting, moved by the breath of life, and having the gift of healing in their leaves. For she had a great faith now that the message she had come to deliver was destined to find a lodgment in men's hearts. The new branch which had sprung out west, where she was now going, filled her with fresh hope, and the distance that stood between gave perspective to her faith: the seed had travelled far.

She was away for two months and came back content with what she had found there; for it meant that even without her own personal direction the spirit of joy had discovered in simple hearts an easy way for itself.

The community had borne the test well, so far as internal harmony was concerned; but absence had not cured them of that idolizing tendency toward herself which the Mother deprecated. They had been writing hymns. This was one of them, submitted to Jane's inspection on the day of her arrival:

*It was the voice of Mother Jane
That called the lost sheep back again,
From wandering down the stony lane,
Whose end is in the pit of flame.
Hallelujah!*

*It was the heart of Mother Jane,
Dividing from the chaff the grain,
That bore us on the harvest wain
To heavenly mansions once again,
Hallelujah!*

*It was the hand of Mother Jane
That loosed the tyrant's captive chain,
And showed the way that made it plain
How Saints on earth a crown can gain.
Hallelujah !*

This was the only one of the hymns submitted to her that Jane censored. She did so by adding a verse, which the happy choristers found awaiting them at their next practice ; —they even started singing it, till its purport became clear to them : then the whole hymn died the death. This was the added verse :

*It was the tongue of Mother Jane
That up and told us straight and plain,
We'd been and took her name in vain ;
And wasn't to do such things again
For the future.*

It is to be feared from that example of Jane's rhyming faculty that she and her following pronounced the ' j ' in Hallelujah with such strength as to make ' the future ' a passable assonant thereto. A year later a book of the community's hymns found its way into print : where, though this particular specimen has no part in it, the name of Jane does once occur. Perhaps in that single instance the Mother-heart relented, unwilling to destroy the composition on account of a single error : or maybe recognizing that the name Jane is a kindly one to find rhymes for.

' Rejoice Greatly ' welcomed her return in the middle of a severe thunder-storm. She arrived drenched. Entering a room she saw Sister Mease sitting conspicuous in the extreme centre with her feet well off the ground. " Lightning never strikes you," she heard her say, " so long as you don't put your feet down."

But she put them down fast enough when she saw Jane ; and her tongue became a diary. In the rush of welcome from all sides which then followed, thunder and lightning were forgotten.

It was good to be among them again, and hear them babbling in their sweet foolishness. Brother Jacob felt the importance of the occasion, and gave voice to it in words personal to himself. "Sing glory! Sing glory!" he cried, "Make a cheerful noise unto the God of Jacob!"

"Aye, do that!" said Jane: "but don't forget the God of Mary Anne."

CHAPTER VI

THE RAM'S HORN

SOME five score of souls were now depending on Jane for their social organization and spiritual sustenance. Their numbers caused her no embarrassment, neither did their unclassified variety. "Get 'em together," she said, "and men are all sheep. I've had more trouble to do with 'em singly, than ever taken in the bunch. And the bigger the bunch (so long as you give 'em something to aim for) the easier they are to manage, *I* find. Why! if the rulers of the world hadn't been always using 'em to their own ends, there's no ends they wouldn't have gone to. Make 'em believe it's for a real big thing and they will, anyhow—so long as they can see something come of it.

"Set 'em killing each other, or saving each other's lives, and you make heroes of all of 'em—any foolishness so long as it's big enough to give 'em grip. Then you bring out the best of 'em—aye, and maybe the worst of 'em too: but it all comes *out*. That's why you see more of a man when he fights than when he only eats and sleeps, taking what comes."

Jane seldom referred in her ministry to public events, for though she and her band lived communally she had drawn them from the world, and its doings hardly touched them. Now and then, however, something stirred her; once the question of war. Europe was in unrest and working up for conflict; and people then, as now, were taking sides and giving good reason for it. But for Jane all side reasons were made foolishness by one main characteristic of war, so different from the honest fist to fist fighting which in her heart for certain ends she rather

approved. And when a dignitary of the Church came and uttered the popular war-cry in Ipsley her tone was scornful.

"Here's a bishop come talking about war," she said; "says you must stop a bully beating a helpless innocent. So you must, if you can. But who ever heard of a war as let you beat the bully without making it worse for the innocents?—two trampling on 'em instead of one. And you says to the innocents as belong to the bully, 'He did it to mine, and you shouldn't get in the way; and you shouldn't belong to him, or you didn't ought to have been born! Anyway it's my Christian duty to trample on yer, though I'm doing it by accident.' It wants a bishop with his soul tied up in apron-strings to eall that the Gospel of Christ!"

Jane knew by her own experience that a soul can stand peaceful amid the roughest surroundings, and run no greater risk of extinction than others who commit themselves to the haphazards of force; and holding that individuals can so live without seeking the law's protection, she believed that nations might well learn to do likewise. But Jane, when she made that trial of humanity, had given up all claim to wealth or individual possession; and even so the biggest test of her was to come.

Sister Mease brought her the first word of it, but in a form which gave no enlightenment. From that blind tongue Jane heard, without perceiving, a story of impending doom.

Sister Mary Anne had been opener of windows in Jane's absence. "And I opened 'em regular," she protested. "'Every night,' I says to myself, 'I've got to open them windows to-morrow first thing,' for I knew how particular you was: and I did, and there was Jacob in his bed one day—still; and I says to 'im—" She branched into conversation. Presently she resumed her narrative.

"And one day I says to Sister Susan who was washing up the dinner-things while I was drying, and it was raining, 'Susan,' I says, 'I'm going upstairs to shut the windows, for I believe the rain's coming in.' And she says to me, 'Very

well, Mary Anne, you'd better then, and I'll go on with the drying.' But I says to her, 'No, you leave that to me, Susan.'” Through another rivulet of conversation, the narrative pursued its epic course and emerged again. “So I went upstairs: and when I got there I found the rain was coming in ever so, only it had just left off. And I was shutting the windows back and front for I said to myself, 'There's no knowing whether it won't come on again'—when I looked out and I saw a party of people coming up the drive: and I said to myself, 'Whoever can that be?' for I didn't know them no more than if they'd been Adam. And I saw them coming up to the door, and I says to myself, 'Whatever can they be come for?' for they looked gentry, and they was too. And I went down to the door, and got there just as they'd knocked: and I opened it, and there they was outside, three of them. And they says to me, 'Was it you as has care of this house?' And I says to them, 'Yes I am; and I've just been upstairs to shut the windows because the rain was coming in;' and they says to me, 'Oh!'"

From this point on, if Sister Mary Anne's story is ever to be finished, it must be written in shorthand; and the reader must take on faith a record which gives only one word in twelve.

“So they says to me, 'We're come to see over the house,' and would I show it them. And they asked did we ever see any ghosts now, or hear any noises, and I said no, and hadn't, not since we come in at the beginning, because you'd laid 'em; and I told 'em all about it. So they said what a good thing that was, and what a difference it must make: and they asked how many slept there: and I said there was over fifty in the house and another fifty sleeping outside in the huts; and they said that was a good number and how it would hold as many more if they was all children. And they asked how many children we'd got here; so I told 'em twenty-five; and they asked whether there was ever any sickness. And I said we hadn't had such a thing, thank God, not since we come. Then they asked to see where we held our meetings, and they was surprised how

nice it looked, and they thought what a good school-room it would make; and I said yes, it did; and we taught the children there ourselves. And they said that was going to be against the law now, because of the new Education Act, and because children would all have to pass under standards with suffocated teachers. Well, of course I said I didn't know anything about that; only I was sure you would; but I couldn't say when you was coming back, because we didn't know. Then I took 'em into the kitchen and the wash-house and the scullery, because they wanted to see them too, and there was Sister Susan had done all the drying up; and I *was* vexed, I can't tell you: and I said, 'Susan why didn't you leave the drying up to me, when you know I'd only gone upstairs to shut the windows because the rain was coming in, and these ladies and this gentleman wanted to come and see over the house, so of course I had to oblige them.' And Susan said, 'Mary Anne, I'm sorry——' "

Here the substance of the narrative ends; and Jane thought little of it. It was not the first time that visitors had come to gaze curiously on a community about which there had been agitation in press and pulpit. Under the Mother's stricter guardianship, though courteously received, they had not hitherto been allowed to penetrate to upper chambers; but the house, like all Jane's doings, was open in its ways; strangers were welcome at meeting, beggars who asked for food sat at the common board, and the locking of doors was almost contrary to their principles.

In that connexion one remarkable fact stood to witness how human nature is seldom wholly base. On the night that has been told of when the community stood on the Hill of Difficulties, till self-expelled a member passed from their midst, Jane had left unguarded in the empty house the box containing the common fund. While in the upper story, with only a single watcher, the children lay asleep, down below the unprotected money had quite sufficiently looked after itself. Guardianship of mere earthly possessions Jane disdained.

It may be doubted, even, whether she kept accounts.

Four times a year she paid to Mr. Chaffwax the mortgage interest which stood instead of rent, and would see then what money remained over: not much, though the margin gradually increased. She took a modest though an uncareful pride in it; it meant that her scheme of life was practical—they were a self-supporting community.

Winter closed in, and the time for payment approached. Mr. Chaffwax came one day to see her. "You are remembering about that interest?" he said.

Jane answered that she could pay it any day.

"It would be convenient," he admitted. "Of course you understand it isn't a legal payment. I couldn't force you: we haven't got any agreement."

"I told you I would pay it," said Jane.

"Quite so, quite so; still, that's how the matter stands: you do it of your own will; the law couldn't make you. Of course it's been an advantage to you living here, and you've had it dirt cheap."

"We've been very happy," said Jane.

"I'm very glad," said Mr. Chaffwax. "That's a relief to my mind; the place having had such a bad name."

She gave him the money and he went off with it. That was on December 19th.

The next day she received notice from him that he would want the house in a week, in order to prepare it for incoming tenants whose intention was to open a school there early in the new year.

When Jane got that letter she had serious doubts about the honesty of Mr. Chaffwax; she was tempted to think badly of him—worse than any of her previous victims.

Wishing to clear her heart of evil thoughts she went to call at his office, and found that he had gone away for the Christmas holiday. When was he going to be back? Perhaps on the 27th, anyway not later than the 30th. For that Jane waited, doing nothing. "It'll be the Lord's showing," she said, when she broke the news to her followers.

"But they can't turn us out, can they, Mother?" inquired an astonished disciple, feeling that there was a strength in numbers.

"Not very well, they can't," said Jane. "But the Lord may tell us to go."

He had not told her to do so yet ; and they kept Christmas with peace in their hearts. There was a little money left in the box ; their winter store of provisions was ample, and in the fields they had large potato buries to draw upon.

The next day but one—the day on which their departure was required of them—Jane was moved to go again to the agent's office. He had not returned, but the clerk told her that she must go ; if she stayed longer she would hinder the incoming tenancy.

She went on to other agents ; then from house to house standing vacant, and found all Ipsley was shut against her. At one or two places where she inquired she saw that her plight was no news to them : word had gone the round.

"It's the Lord's showing," she said, as she set her face homeward. Snowflakes were starting to fall, and the day which had begun cheerlessly was tossing toward a twilight of unrest. No plan had she yet shaped, she could not see ahead. "It'll come, it'll come!" she told herself: then thought of the children, and to give them a last cheerful evening went into a shop and bought four large bags of buns.

Going thus laden she greatly enjoyed herself ; the unwonted extravagance kindled her faith. The buns, fresh and new, lay warm upon her breast, seeming to promise life ; and there came into her mind a quaint conceit, which it took hold of and cherished with repetition. "Aye, surely, surely, the Bread of Life which came down from Heaven was made of self-raising flour." Thus in the day of her affliction was Jane able to extract comfort from penny buns.

Meanwhile at 'Rejoice Greatly' events were already moving. Just after forenoon, all the men being then absent at work, the women and children seated at their midday meal heard a hammering in the field behind the house. One who went to see came back with the news that workmen were nailing up the doors of the huts.

"They've turned everything out," reported the messenger, "the beds are all lying there in the open!"

So it was. All went out to see with their own eyes this thing that was being done.

"What are you doing there?" they inquired.

"Our orders," said the men.

Further question was met only by curt reply. "You'd better get on," said the foreman in charge. "We shall be coming for the house next. You've got to be out before night."

"Out?"

That desolate word passed from mouth to mouth. They looked at each other but could find no meaning in it. The catastrophe was too sudden and too large for their minds yet to take in. They stood round and watched the men at their work, with a horrible fascination and senses numbed.

A child said wonderingly, "Mother, we aren't going away, are we?"

"I don't know," the mother replied. Then grief took hold of some of those standing round, and they began to cry.

"Oh, why isn't Mother Jane here?" wept one: "she'd know what to do."

Presently the men came to the meeting-house. "Where's the key of this?" inquired the foreman.

"It hasn't got a key."

He looked in, and appraised the fittings.

"Chairs and anything loose may come out," he said. "Anything fixed stays. Now then: if you want to take anything, look sharp!"

Sheeplike the unhappy women entered, and came out carrying benches and chairs. School-books and instruments of music followed. The Table of Testimony came last.

Elsewhere the men, to speed matters, were carrying out removals on their own. The simplicity of that communal life made the task easy: the open space outside became piled with a litter of household appliances and tools.

Presently they came to the stores : these were a heavier item and took more time. They carried out sacks of flour, and sides of bacon, and candles, and cans of oil. They threw out wood faggots, they rolled barrels containing they knew not what. Sometimes under their rough usage one of these was staved in, or its top came off, and out filtered the contents. They laughed, for the lust of destruction had taken hold of them ; they threw together things which broke ; as the piles mounted so did the confusion. Then snow began to fall but melted as it fell, and the short winter day began to draw in.

This was the position of affairs to which Jane returned : the men had then begun clearing the upper rooms ; and the women for the most part stood down below watching as the furniture emerged. A large pile of it already stood outside.

One, who saw and remembered Jane's coming upon this scene, said that her face went very white, and her eyes all fierce. But a moment later the Lord's showing was upon her and she gave the word of command. "Why don't you all go in and help 'em ?" she said. "Aye, and you children too. Be quick all of yer ! There's going to be buns for tea."

And immediately into that forlorn band went movement and energy and life. Up and down they sped, carrying loads, falling, picking themselves up again, making a rough order of the confusion lying without, sorting, stacking, covering from the weather things that would spoil or stain. Tongues were loosed, exerted bodies grew warm, now and then among the young laughter was heard.

When some of the men came home, under Jane's direction they got rick-cloths and poles, and in the field behind the house rigged up a tent. It only gave room enough for the children : but they piled it with bedding and made it warm, and heaved up a barrier to windward of furniture and loose planks.

Darkness was then setting in. They built a fire, put kettles to boil, and made tea ; and when the children had their buns the elders ate bread, and such fragments of

cold meat as could be found left over from the midday meal.

In the late dusk, the workmen, their inside job finished, nailed up the shutters, fastened the doors, then shouldered their tools and went.

Jane stood to watch them go. She said to one of her followers standing near, "They've left us that, anyhow!" She pointed to the blue-and-white signboard over the door bearing the words 'Rejoice Greatly.' "We'll take that with us," she said. "You get it down!"

The man went and fetched a ladder, and the relic was brought down.

Jane took it in her hands, looked at it, and a smile came over her face. "Ah, it's true still," she said. "We'll make it true. O Lord, teach us to see the humour of it!"

CHAPTER VII

A LIFT BY THE WAY

DURING the community's first night of a homeless condition the weather did not treat them kindly ; it stormed and rained, the fire would not keep alive, and there were only five umbrellas among the lot. But their hearts were warm, and the infection of Jane's courage and cheerfulness pervaded each group as she visited them by turns.

"We sat along benches under the hedge with sacks and tarpaulins over us," was the account one gave afterwards ; "and the Mother came and told us stories about America ; and she did make us laugh ! Then we sang hymns and prayed."

Here and there cubbies had been constructed from piled furniture, with dry boards and mattresses to lie on. Into these the old and the infirm were stowed for the night ; in other sheltered places the women, paired for warmth, took their turns of sleep lying down ; and the men likewise. Nevertheless it was a long waiting ; and all the while within a stone's throw lay house and meeting-place, into which, with none now to prevent, they might so easily have forced their way and found cover. Perhaps that was the humour of it, which Jane had prayed that they might see.

For the next three days they lived strenuously. They hired a large tent and set it up in their own field allotment, rigged up subsidiary shelters around it, and transported thither all their worldly belongings. All who thought they could do better for themselves were made free to go without blame or discouragement, but only some seven or eight, having relatives in the neighbourhood, availed themselves of the choice.

The house which had been so hastily seized from them did not come under the repairer's hands till a week later. Then in the scullery copper was found, all gone bad, the soup which had been brewed for the evening meal, and in the haste of removal left unclaimed by its owners.

It seemed a pity ; and though Ipsley heard the story derisively, some were ashamed. One, whom that little thing in the midst of a larger tragedy had touched to compassion, stood at the door of Ipsley parish church on the Sunday following, holding a box for alms, with object stated. He took three shillings and fourpence as a result ; and carried to the community that measure of the sympathy which the town's largest congregation had heart to bestow.

When Jane heard of it she thought it a great thing : but that was afterwards. By this time she was already gone, and had reached a destination.

The community had seen the burning of her eye ; and when on the third day sheltered existence of a kind had been restored to them she called her flock together. "I'm going West," she said. "It's the Lord's showing." They took her word for it, as always, without question. But this second departure, coming so close upon the great affliction which had befallen them, caused doubt and timidity to spring in certain minds. Feeling like orphans they sought a sign by which to comfort themselves. Their expulsion had been recorded in the local press, and under the slighting application of nicknames they had felt themselves belittled and derided.

"We be left as a beacon on the top of a mountain," said Jacob, "and as an ensign on a hill. But how are the Gentiles to seek after us, and we to be called the chosen, when we haven't found ourselves a name ?"

It seemed reasonable : having no longer an abiding-place, all the more they required a title to cover them.

They sought the oracle. "Mother," they asked, "what ought we to call ourselves ?"

"What cause have ye to call yourselves anything ?" Jane inquired.

"So as to make ourselves known when people hear of us."

“Make yourselves known by what ye are !”

“Aye, truly,” consented Jacob, “but what are we ? Once we had a rest and an abiding. We be birds of passage now !”

“Birds of Paradise !” said Jane. “Go on, spread your tails if you want to : but don’t ask me to comb ’em for you. I’ve too much else to do.”

They took her at her very word ; and as the cheerfulness of its sound made them happy she saw no reason to change it.

She made ready for her journey. Her mind was upon it with a certainty beyond all words, and yet it seemed hardly reasonable ; for how could that small gathering of twelve bring succour and assistance to a congregation of over four score ? But it was not in those ways that Jane reckoned. There, where her heart now turned, the sown seed had sprung ; the soil was kind.

“I’m not leaving you to yourselves this time,” she said, as she bade farewell to her flock on the morning of her going. “I’m carrying you all with me. Aye, and it’s a mighty load !”

A hundred and fifty miles lay ahead of her ; and because time pressed and her feet could no longer cover the mileage they had once traversed, she did not disdain to beg lifts from vehicles which passed her on the way. Very few refused, for she looked into faces first ; and many were the kinds which, for distances from one mile up to ten, gave her the aid she sought. They did not all better her own pace, some being farm wagons ; but as they saved her feet they saved her time, and while she rested bore her nearer to her goal. She passed beautiful towers—the old red brick of a Norman Abbey, the vast crowning rotundity of a royal palace, parish churches, and a great place in a hollow where kings had once been crowned. These were the landmarks of her road ; and Jane, though she knew little of history, had a sense of the human greatness that belonged to them. They were things of love : men must have cared much when they made so enduringly and on so vast a scale tabernacles for hearts of clay to rest in. But though she

admired she wondered at it all. "Having to live indoors is such a trouble!" she told herself, taught by recent experience; but could see no way out. "It's what I've got to find."

She had travelled well over a hundred miles, and was not far from the place for which she aimed.

She came presently to a district where traffic was seldom. Here there were no farms; a wide stretch of uncultivated and sparsely inhabited land lay before her; she walked all day.

Gradually fatigue brought depression of spirit, and a temptation, which in her better moments she fought off, returned to lay its weight on her. She still thought badly of Mr. Chaffwax, for she had not as yet been able to see the humorous side of him. Worst of all was his running away from her, and staying away out of reach till his deed of darkness had been done. In her heart of hearts she had not yet forgiven him; therefore, when the flesh was weak, he came to depress her now. For three hours he kept her company, infecting her mind.

Very weary toward evening she sat down by a roadside brook, and taking off shoes and stockings dipped her feet to the flow. The water was very cold, yet in spite of the pain it brought refreshment to the broken and fevered surfaces; so with closed eyes she sat and endured for a while.

Along the road came a shuffling tread of feet, as of one walking in shoes that were too large. Jane turned her head and saw an old gipsy tramp, very ragged and dirty, her head tied up in a handkerchief.

The tramp slowed for a halt, eyed her hard, then stopped.

"Having a pleasant journey?" inquired Jane.

The woman drew near, looking curiously.

"What are yer doing there?" she inquired. "Fishing?"

"With my toes?" said Jane. "Aye: you ain't far wrong."

The woman came, leaned by the rail under which Jane was sitting, and looked down.

"My old father used to fish for crabs with his toes," she remarked meditatively: "got a lot of 'em that way."

"He was a brave man," said Jane.

"When he was a boy," the other explained, timing the heroic age. "Used to go and sit on the rocks by the sea-shore and put his feet down into all the 'oles. As soon as they caught hold he drew 'em up."

"He must have been hungry to do that!"

"Aye, it's hunger makes us do most things we rather wouldn't." The tramp, as she spoke, picked up the hem of her skirt and tore off it a ragged length of braid. As she did so she cast a sharp glance up the road and down.

Inspection told her that no other soul was in sight. Suddenly she started running.

Jane gazed after her in surprise, and saw that in one hand the fugitive was carrying a pair of shoes. This supplied a clue to the mystery: she found that her own were gone.

Shoes being an absolute necessity to her, Jane's first impulse was to bundle up and be after her. But a long stretch of road-mending lay ahead; over this she found speed on bare feet impossible.

Making the best of a bad business, "The Lord bless 'em to yer!" she called ahead; "but they won't fit yer!"

The woman made no reply: the social bond between them was broken. Zigzagging for smooth places to run on, she galloped heavily forward with lurch and twist, and became presently an insignificant blot in the distance. Then she turned to look back, and seeing that she was not pursued settled down to walking pace.

Jane's countenance lost its look of mirth, and fell back to melancholy. "So here am I," she sighed, "ten miles from nowhere, and only my own feet to do it on! It'll be the Lord's showing if I get well out of this."

She picked up and made a neat roll of her stockings, put them into her bundle, and followed in the same direction her shoes had taken.

At the first door she came to, a mile farther on, she begged plump out for a pair of old shoes to be given her. After a look of detection cast at her improbably bare feet,

these were denied, and the door was shut. On the face of it she had to admit that she looked an impostor.

Before she had gone another mile progress had become acutely painful. The winter sun was reddening to its last decline, and the air had gone shrewd with a touch of frost. Doubting whether in her present condition she could hold on and find human lodging for the night, she began to look about for commoner shelter—some hutch, or barn, or haystack, into which she might burrow and get warmth. Presently a turn of the road brought her through a screen of fir-wood to a broad outlook of level plain pastoral in character.

Far away in the distance, still warmed by the evening light, she saw a tall tower-like erection rising palely against the darkening layers of sky. Its proportions puzzled her; too gaunt and straight-edged for a church, it was yet too broad to be a chimney; also it had windows set rigidly at intervals from top to base, and, as indicated by a protuberance to one side, an outer staircase.

“Whatever of a Jacob’s ladder thing is that?” was Jane’s mental query on first beholding it. A little later her critical instinct was aroused. “Well, you are no beauty anyway!” she apostrophized the offending landmark; “but you’re there.” It cheered and amused her, drew her from self-centred thought, and gave her something of a hopeful uprightness by which to measure progress.

As she trudged heavily on, the fields and hedges darkened around her, the low horizon diminished, but the road remained light.

Suddenly a gleam on the topmost window of the tower gave sign that from that high elevation the sun had not yet sunk. Her heart leapt. “There’s the Lord’s showing!” she cried.

A sound of swift travelling wheels sprang up behind, and a horse, violently whipped, and pulled this way and that, came hazarding toward her. Jane backed into the hedge and the vehicle sped past.

A hundred yards farther, collision with a heap of stones, followed by a sharp veer to left, drove horse and conveyance

into the ditch ; the driver pitched out over the horse's head and disappeared.

When Jane arrived on the scene he sat nursing a sprained wrist, half in the ditch half out : his whip lay out in the road, and his tongue was doing all the work.

Jane without words began extricating horse and trap. "Take care," said the man, "he'll bite you ! He's got a devil of a temper ; look out !"

"Not he !" said Jane, with a little scorn, "'twasn't me as was whipping him." And in truth, to her handling, the horse became wonderfully amenable.

The coachman hauled himself up, and hobbled stiffly towards them. "You seem to have the understanding of him," he said presently.

"Aye," she replied, "it comes, if you are fond of 'em."

He stood, a bit shaken and out of nerve, handling the reins with crippled touch preparatory to mounting. "We don't know each other yet, me and him," he explained apologetically. "He's young and he hasn't been properly broken."

"You was introducing yourself to him fast enough when I saw you," said Jane.

"'Twas all temper," said the man.

"Ah !" went her sage comment : "his or yours ?" Then seeing his difficulty with the reins, "Here !" she said, "you haven't your hand, and I haven't my feet. I'll drive for you."

She took the reins and mounted beside him. "What's this—a bathing machine ?"

"There you've hit it !" he said. "Barnaby's bather, we call it."

It was very like one : a box-like receptacle with top windows, and a roof-seat for the driver. The door at the back had a small window also, across which fluttered a green curtain. But in spite of its queer design the exterior bore a fine polish, the wheels were spandily painted, and the harness was of good quality.

"Who's Barnaby ?" inquired Jane.

"That's my master, Mr. Barnaby Hebron ; down in

these parts he's well known to history—owns half the land, he does."

"What does he go about in a coffin like this for?"

"He don't much like people to look at him—not strangers."

"What? Is he so beautiful as all that?"

The man looked at her as though the remark puzzled him, but made no direct answer.

"I'm his coachman," he explained. "It's been in my family forty years now."

"And you no chicken," commented Jane.

They were in comfortable progress again, going at an easy pace in the direction of the tower.

"It was my Uncle James," he went on, "had it first—in this one's time. But oh, he's a curious gentleman; you never know where you'll have him! Twenty-five years my uncle served him faithful: then, one Saturday, went up as usual to get his week's wages. As soon as ever he got in he saw a queer look in the master's eye; and the master sat and looked at him without speaking—uncle wondering all the time what the matter could be.

"Presently Mr. Hebron he come-to like, give a sort of a sigh, and says he, 'James, how long have you been in my service?' My uncle told him how long. 'Really?' says Mr. Hebron. 'D'you mean to say you've been as long as all that? I should never have thought it. Well, James, I give you notice that after to-day your services won't be required. And here,' he says, 'is a little present for you; and I'm much obliged to you for all you've done.'

"He put down a note for twenty pounds, but my uncle was too astonished to take it; he could hardly believe his ears. Well, at last he managed to ask what he'd done.

"'I don't want to be personal, James,' said Master, 'and I don't say as it's your fault. We'll make it twenty-five pounds and say no more about it.'

"But my uncle, he had his pride; so he wasn't going to have it left like that. And he up and he says to the Master, 'Damn your twenty-five pounds!' says he, 'I want none

of 'em. What I want is a reason for why I'm to be treated like this.'

" 'Spoke like a Briton,' says Master; and he couldn't have been more affable and nice than he was then. 'Well, James, the fact is I don't like them whiskers of yours. They don't suit you!'

"Uncle James stared. 'Why, I've had 'em for thirty years!' says he, innocent-like. 'That's it,' says Master. 'I'm tired of 'em. And it's either you or they as have got to go. You can make your choice: cut 'em off, and you can stay. But to keep you *and* them on my premises is more than I can stand.'

"Now my Uncle James was uncommon proud of his whiskers—more than any man I ever met; which, maybe, was the reason why Master went for 'em. They was fox-colour, and he wore 'em in a round curl, rather the old-fashioned way: you don't see anything like 'em now, and even then they was a bit of a rarity. Anyway, having got at what it was Mr. Hebron had in his mind, what must he do but hang on to his whiskers as if they was his only hope of salvation! And he stood up to Mr. Hebron fine, and wouldn't give in to him, not an inch.

"Mr. Hebron, he didn't turn a hair either; he was more polite to him, treated him more like an equal than he'd ever done. 'Spoke like a Briton,' he says again. 'I admire you, James; but I don't admire your whiskers. And I'll take back the twenty-five pounds,' says he, 'and give you a pension instead.'

"They parted friendly in a way; but that was the last time they ever met. And my uncle and his whiskers had a pension up to the day he died. And he knew that any day he'd only to cut 'em off, and Master 'ud take him back again. Ah! they both had their pride, but it took 'em different ways."

"He must be a tremendous character," said Jane.

"He's the finest of his sort as ever breathed," declared the other; "but queer, oh, very queer!"

They were now within a mile of the tower. To one side of it stood a large spreading mansion built in the Italian

style. "That's his place," said the man nodding. He took over the reins as he spoke. "I wouldn't like him to see a woman driving this."

"Does he live up in yon tower?" inquired Jane.

"He goes there," said the coachman; "but we don't always know where he is: and nobody must go to look for him. For all we know, weeks at a time, he may be there or anywhere. I often wonder what his end'll be. He has another place thirty miles off; and he never gives you a day's notice when he's going."

Rounding a copse near a fork of roads, they saw ahead of them a bent and trudging figure which Jane recognized. The tramp walked painfully, but still at a pace which suggested pressure and no time to be lost.

"That body has got my shoes on," said Jane.

"Eh?" cried her companion, and waited for the clue to be given him. Jane gave the facts.

"Ah, let her alone!" she concluded. "She's wrought a good work in me. It was the Lord's showing, right enough."

Anxious to make it clear that she was no longer a thing to be run away from, Jane accosted her cheerily while passing. Sticking out a bare foot, and wagging her toes, "Crabs!" she said. "Are they pinching yer?"

The tramp looked at her stolidly as though they had never met before, and with that look on her face did not swerve to the other choice of road which at that moment offered. The carriage moved on; behind its bulk the woman disappeared. A few minutes later, as it neared its destination, she dropped from the back step on which she had been riding comfortably, and disappeared down a side lane.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PROMISED LAND

THE coachman and his wife gave Jane a lodging for the night, supplying her also with a pair of old boots. Their small lodge lay at the entrance of the premises under the shadow of the great tower. The name of the place was Mount Pisgah.

Looking up the next morning at the huge mass overhead, "That's not quite straight," Jane remarked.

"No," said the coachman. "They do say it's a bit out; got a twist to it somehow."

"It's got too much on top, that's what's wrong: made all of concrete too, no wonder it looks ugly!"

"We reckon it a handsome bit of architecture in these parts," corrected her host.

"Well, it's a thing to see!" said Jane, wishing to be charitable. "Anyway, it's told me what I'm to do next."

"You are going on somewhere?" queried the wife.

"Yes, I shall be going on, presently," said Jane, "but I'll see this Mr. Hebron of yours first."

The coachman stared, struck all of a heap. "Why ever?" he asked.

"Because it's what I've come for."

"How d'you think you are going to see him?"

"He's not invisible, is he?"

"Very near. He's living up in the top of the Tower now."

"Well, I've got legs like the rest of you."

"Ah, you don't know him."

"I mean to," said Jane, whose nose for human character had told her that Mr. Barnaby Hebron was worth cultivating.

The coachman looked at her with respect but incredulity.

"I suppose he gets his letters in the mornings?" she went on. The man admitted it; and that morning Mr. Hebron got one from Jane.

Somewhere she touched him: he sent word that she was to come up to him.

Jane toiled upward, counting the stairs as she went. "Three hundred and thirty-three: that's half the number of the Beast," she said to herself as she came to the last landing and knocked. A light and spacious chamber received her, square as a cube with a long window in each wall.

Mr. Hebron was quiet and abrupt.

"Are you mad?" he asked when the tall gaunt figure stood before him.

"No more than yourself," she answered: "but we both do queer things. It's the only way to get on in a country where there's no freedom except what you make for yourself."

"Please to sit down," said Mr. Hebron. "That remark shows sound political sense."

"I've nothing to do with politics," said Jane.

"It's no use saying that, if politics have to do with you. What do you want?"

Jane had already taken stock of him: a pleasant-looking elderly gentleman, with hair that had once been auburn now turning grey. An air of humorous benevolence pervaded his countenance, which had about it a sort of brusque dignity the reverse of patriarchal. On one of his well-kept hands he wore a large signet ring; and his rather *négligé* attire, soft coloured shirt, and loose tie carried a flavour of refinement indicative of a nice choice, possibly even of a sense of beauty.

"What do you want?" he inquired.

"I want," said Jane, "a parcel of land—ten acres—and the right to build on it."

"I allow no building on my estate," said Mr. Hebron.

"Wooden huts," expounded Jane.

"What—for poultry?"

"No, for humans ; though ' Birds of Paradise ' they do call themselves. And when you turn us out—as maybe you will—you can pull 'em down and make firewood of 'em."

Mr. Hebron became interested. "Who is 'us'?" he inquired.

"Just those I live among," said Jane. "We are all one fold and one family, having found the Lord."

"I did not know that He had been lost," retorted Mr. Hebron, with a certain coldness of disdain.

"You're right, but He's been left in a dry ditch by some folk ; and we're for getting Him out."

"And for that you need ten acres and a number of wooden huts, do you?"

"No : that's for getting ourselves out. At present we've nowhere."

"How many are you?"

"There's a hundred and twenty-seven of us. But I doubt whether they'll all come."

Mr. Hebron sat up. "That is indeed a large family—almost a tribe. And what are your tenets, pray?"

"Nothing in particular. We just go our own road. If we see light we follow it : and if we don't see light we wait for it. Trying to be happy we reckon the best way to getting at the truth."

"So you hope to be happy in wooden huts?"

"We've been happy in a haunted house," said Jane. "And when we'd got rid of the ghosts for 'em, they let the place over our heads and turned us out."

Mr. Hebron took a contemplative view of her. "What brought you to me?"

"Your own coach," said Jane. "My shoes and I had parted company, so I asked for a lift."

"I'm sure you were welcome. But what brought you to this neighbourhood?"

"I go where I'm called," she answered ; "I don't ask the Lord where He's taking me. But He hasn't never failed me yet. My heart leapt up when I beheld this tower in the sky. It's always been like that : it always will be. His guidance don't never fail."

"Ma'am," inquired Mr. Hebron, "are you quoting Wordsworth or Scripture?"

"I'm telling you what's in my own heart," said Jane; "and in yours too: for we are more of a mind about things than you are for owning to."

"I would rather not think so, just yet," said Mr. Hebron cautiously.

"I've been long ways in my time," she went on, "but I've never had to turn back empty. There always comes a sign. When that tower of yours showed me its light, I had a powerful feeling in me then. 'There's sense in that,' says I, 'though fools may have had the building of it.' And I didn't know what it was for."

"Why do you see sense in it?"

"Because the going high uplifts a man. It tries your legs: but there's something spiritual about it, for all that. It's like prayers."

Mr. Hebron showed hearty agreement. "If you believe in prayer at all," he said, "going upstairs is the best form of it I know."

"You make yours long enough then," commented Jane. "But you have to come down 'em again to be made human."

"I don't find that," said Mr. Hebron.

"What do you find then, when you've got there?"

"Mainly myself, ma'am."

"Ah, and that's a great discovery: there's many as miss it. Some only get their idea of themselves from looking in the glass."

"I found that so wearisome," said Mr. Hebron, "that I gave up shaving." He stroked his beard as he spoke, turning up the ends to look at them.

"Well, it's given you your reward," replied Jane enigmatically. "You don't need a glass to see it by."

Mr. Hebron heard the hint of underlying laughter and shot a glance at her; but he was not offended. On the contrary, her straight dealing appeared to please him.

"Ma'am," he said, "you seem to be a person not only of sense but of perception. If I can do you any real service I shall be glad."

"I'm going to make you happy then," said Jane.

Briefly she recounted the circumstances of her ejected community.

"You all seem very unanimous," commented Mr. Hebron when she had done. "And so you have on your hands a hundred and twenty helpless people, soon to be starving if the locality will not find them employment. You have led them into the wilderness with a high hand and a stretched-out arm: but seriously, what do you propose doing with them?"

Jane accepted with composure the critical gaze he directed against her. "Lead 'em to the Promised Land," said she.

"I haven't promised it yet," Mr. Hebron warned her.

"No? But I've seen something as is going to suit me."

"Here?"

"That old barn of yours standing alone with nothing to it. I heard as it was empty, so I went to see it. That, and the bit of wood by it, and three fields just anywhere will be all I want. When can we come in?"

"Ma'am," said Mr. Hebron, "you certainly have a remarkable character!"

"So it ought to be: I've lost it often enough."

"You are a married woman, are you not?"

"I'm a widow."

"You have children?"

"I've buried what I had."

"I hope you had a good husband?—if you will pardon me."

"One as done me a power of good," said Jane: "like everything else in this world if you take it right. I've not got to complain of my fellow-creatures. There's some as is sheep one day and goats the next, till you don't know which to call 'em: and when they comes to the day of Judgment, it'll be like 'Round-the-ring,' I'm thinking: no one'll know, when the music stops, which side he's got to sit down on. And there's use for both sorts, or I'm much mistaken."

"I perceive," said Mr. Hebron, "that you are a student of human nature."

"I've had doings with 'em all my life," said Jane, "and it wasn't with my eyes shut."

"Ah, that is the real road to salvation. It is extraordinary how the unpractical and the theorists exalt themselves in these days. Board-school education has begun to dig the grave for our true English character."

"But there'll be the resurrection," said Jane cheerfully.

"Do you think it will stand examination?"

"Well, they do say it's for examination they are training 'em. And in the life to come, it's naked we shall all find ourselves. That'll make a laughable sight of some folk, that will."

Mr. Hebron was much entertained: Jane's quick turns of speech attracted him.

"Pardon me," he said. "What do you do yourself?"

"I swing a light," said Jane.

"I don't quite understand."

"I'm a preacher."

Mr. Hebron experienced a slight shock, for he did not like preachers. "What? Does your family get its moral training from you then?"

"I've mothered 'em."

"Into the wilderness apparently."

"Aye, I'm a pelican," said Jane.

"'In piety'? I don't see much tearing of the breast." But this allusion was lost on her.

"You seem to have antagonized a good many people. I'm not sure that you won't antagonize me."

"There's no denying people called us a nuisance," said Jane. "But that was when we lived next door to a publican."

"And I suppose you were."

"We used to hold meetings at night when he was doing his trade; and he didn't like it. So many come to us instead of him."

"Ah, you were on the temperance war-path, I suppose?"

"We was on the war-path for the joy of life," retorted Jane. "It says in the Scripture that wine maketh glad the heart: but I never knew beer or whisky do it—not the

beer and whisky you get in the poor man's public, anyway. That's denied to him nowadays."

"Ma'am, you are right," said Mr. Hebron, "the British constitution no longer exists!"

"And what do you call yourselves?" he inquired next. "You have a name, I suppose?"

"We never troubled much about a name," Jane replied. "'The Jokers' it was first. Then some said we was 'Ark of the Covenant'; and 'Noah's ark' they called us. Then it was 'the clean and the unclean beasts': that pleased 'em well. And often enough we come out clean and went in dirty, after they'd had the handling of us. Of course that's what made us strong, for the spirit of the Lord always prefers the rough road to the smooth, for a start."

"If you were my neighbour," said Mr. Hebron, "I see plainly that we should quarrel about some things and agree about others."

"When I'm your neighbour," said Jane, "you'll find it a Lord's blessing to have some one by who don't always pretend to agree with you."

"If you come and preach to me," said Mr. Hebron, "I shall throw at you the largest stones I can find."

"And welcome," replied Jane.

"I only wish to warn you: I am not going to be one of your flock. Your God is probably my Devil: so don't ask me whether I have found religion."

"Some people," remarked Jane, "have got their God and Devil rolled all into one; and it's a toss-up, according to which side of the bed they get out, which of 'em they prays to of a morning."

"I shall remember that, ma'am, the next time prayer takes me," said Mr. Hebron.

"When you are going up them long stairs of yours—doing yourself proud!"

"I shouldn't wonder," he remarked. "Well, you can have the three fields and the wooden huts. But the barn is not habitable."

"You come with me," said Jane, "and I'll show you

whether the barn's habitable or not." Thus she drove him before her by the wind of her spirit.

"I capitulate," said Mr. Hebron. "Jericho is down. If it falls on your head, on your head be it. The barn is yours!"

"I knew that the first time I set eyes on it," said Jane.

She carried report of her successful mission to the astonished coachman and his wife. "And he's coming up to the barn this afternoon to see it over with me," she said.

"Well, if you've got to the right of him," said Mr. Roberts, "and all so quick—you've done something!"

Jane did not think so much of her conquest as they seemed to do.

"There's some," she said, "as are all outside of 'emselfes, and not worth knowing at that; and there's others as is all inside, so you can't get to 'em. But I never come on any one with so many inside-outs and outside-ins as he's got. You'd think he was all fancy-bred to hear him talk; but he isn't." She halted, then added for a final—"Though he's a monkey o' mischief, I must say."

Mr. Roberts had never heard his master talked of like this before—especially not by one of 'the lower orders.' He was considerably scandalized.

"He's a great gentleman," he said, "and does a powerful lot of good among the poor—you wouldn't believe."

"I would," declared Jane heartily. "But he wants to see himself: everything he does for you, image and super-scription have got to be his. If he could have got your uncle's whiskers off him, it 'ud a' pleased him so, he'd almost have wore 'em himself!"

"He's a great gentleman," said the coachman again.

"He's got a showing of the light," Jane owned, "more than most. But up there in his tower he just sits in his own lap petting himself. It might be a charity if some one would pull it down for him. What's he done with his wife?"

"She's up in London most of the year," said Roberts; "they are good friends when they visit each other, but

they don't live together. You see they haven't got any children and she's all for society ; but he prefers living single."

"Ah, he's a lone soul," said Jane, "and you can't help but be sorry for him."

Mr. Roberts again administered correction. "He's very much respected in these parts," he said.

"So he ought to be !" But respect never shut Jane's mouth to the truth as she conceived it.

A while later the coachman came in to report. "Mr. Hebron's gone up the road," said he. "Wasn't you to be there to meet him ?"

"Before his time then," said Jane, and set out to follow.

As she went up the winding lane, ill-metalled and rather muddy, she observed in the distance a muffled figure coming toward her. He walked with a slight limp, following a zigzag course, and with eyes fixed on the ground. A broad mushroom hat with a high crown was set deep on the head, and the long ends of the crimson silk muffler blew out in the wind. On nearer approach she discovered that it was Mr. Hebron.

His first remark explained the retracing of his steps and the peculiarity of his gait.

"I have lost the heel of one shoe," he said. "It was a very good heel while it lasted, and it would be a pity to lose it."

Jane turned back with him. "If you've been down the road before," she said presently, "you needn't go playing feather-stitch like that. All you've got to do is to find your own footprints and follow 'em."

"A very sagacious remark," admitted Mr. Hebron. "Where do you originally come from ?"

Jane told him.

"'Silly Suffolk,' then, does not apply to you. It is, in any case, one of those unjust catch-words which local jealousy is prone to. Uninstructed popular opinion continues to lead nations by the nose ; and having given it political power we call it 'democracy.' We are in the age of majorities. It makes the superficial definition of human

nature much easier ; but it does nothing to get rid of the social problem."

"Death's the only thing as does that," said Jane.

"Ah, but you are mistaken!" exclaimed her companion ; "a controlled birth-rate is more effective, much more, I assure you. Pending that, assisted emigration."

"When you've controlled human nature, you'll control the birth-rate," said Jane ; "and not before, I'm thinking. It'll be a long way for you."

"Is your family—prolific?" inquired Mr. Hebron.

"It's doing reasonably well : them as is born to it don't die—so far."

"Well, if you have lowered your death-rate, it's a sort of certificate of character, I admit. I shall watch you with interest."

Jane stooped and picked up something. "There's your heel, sir, stuck in the mud just as you left it."

"Thank you," said Mr. Hebron, "your eyes are sharper than mine." He took the heel, went across and wiped it carefully on the roadside bank. "You see," he went on, exposing it to view, "it was really worth the trouble ; that edge just a little worn makes it so much more comfortable to walk on, besides being a better match for the other."

They now turned toward their original destination. As they did so Mr. Hebron unbuttoned his double-breasted overcoat, exchanged the flaps and buttoned it the other way.

"I always fasten my coat away from the wind," he explained : "it makes it so much warmer."

"You're a thoughtful body," remarked Jane. "I wonder you don't sleep all through the winter."

"I really think I would," declared Mr. Hebron, "if only one could solve the commissariat problem."

"Have a bag of nuts by you. It only wants the will. And if you kept in your nest, there'd be less carrying up of coals for you."

"Yes, will-power can do a great deal," assented Mr. Hebron, "if it is prepared to make sacrifices. It is constantly the material possessions of life, or love of ease, that keep us from performing miracles."

“You are right there,” said Jane.

“An instance in my own early life,” he went on, “occurs to me—the only heroic thing I ever did. I was brought up by an uncle who regarded corporal punishment as a cure for youthful eccentricities ; and it happened that I was one whom corporal punishment did not suit. This, however, only came home to me when one day I was made a victim of the remedy without deserving it. I then conceived what I have ever since regarded as an inspiration. I emulated the example of Miss Matilda Mason, of whom in Mrs. Turner’s ‘Cautionary Stones’ you may have read :

*One fine day Matilda Mason,
In the parlour by herself,
Broke a handsome china basin
Standing on the mantel-shelf.*

That is what *I* did : with this difference, that I did it under my uncle’s very eyes, and told him why.

“Of course I received another terrible thrashing, during which, I have no doubt, I howled for mercy. As I did not receive it, there was (upon Rousseau’s definition) no longer a social contract between us ; and so when the lash had ceased to fall and I was bidden to solitary retirement in my own chamber, I deflected my agonized course to the drawing-room, and overthrew a large and very valuable ormolu clock which far transcended in importance the broken basin ; for it belonged not to my aunt but to him.

“With cold-blooded heroism I returned and told my uncle I had done it. The poor petrified man showed a self-possession for which I cannot sufficiently admire him. I believe that from that day he became a prophetic convert to the Darwinian theory, when the missing link between man and monkey stood thus indubitably before him.

“My next thrashing was postponed for three days, and coming on the top of confinement on a low diet of bread and water found me somewhat shaken in my resistance. I was flogged till I promised upon my honour never to do such things again.

"The word 'honour,' then so outrageously invoked, has ever since had a deep and compelling interest for me ; and such honour as I now possess and endeavour to practise stands rooted in the dishonour of the action to which I committed myself on my release a week later, when I cut up in its frame by two diagonal strokes a sham Titian of which my uncle was inordinately proud.

"I fear I did not thus improve his taste for, or his connoisseurship in art ; but I cured him of thrashing me. When I went to school he passed on to the head master, as I learned later, the warning I had given him. 'He is not a bad boy,' he said, 'except by fits ; but it's no use thrashing him. If you do, he'll murder you in your bed and burn the house down.'

"That certificate of character for a boy, 'not bad except by fits,' I have always treasured with a grateful heart. But there is a fallacy in it. Had my uncle valued his efforts to misshape my character more than his ormolu clocks and his Titians, he could have succeeded : another turn or two of the screw regardless of expense, and my will-power would have been broken.

"In a small way that incident threw light for me on the doctrine of eternal punishment which I had been brought up to believe. For if God has a mind for it, He has got all eternity wherein to experiment ; and if, so to speak, He can stand the racket and the expense in spiritual deterioration which must result, we shall no doubt in the end be all changed (though not quite in the twinkling of an eye) into 'something not ourselves making for righteousness'—like a dog on a chain which tries to bite beyond its tether but is unable—and hating righteousness with all the soul that is left to us."

Jane listened soberly till Mr. Hebron had finished his well-polished periods. "I wonder," she then said, "what they'd say to you if you started preaching? Ah, you've some of the light in you," she went on, "but it's all done up like a box of matches ; and you don't use 'em to light no candles for people to see in the dark by. You fire 'em off like squibs, that's what you do."

"Ma'am," said Mr. Hebron, "I was only explaining myself by telling you a bit of my family history."

"You'd some ugly characters among you," said Jane oracularly.

They reached the barn. It stood a little way back from the road, in an enclosure which had once been yard, now overgrown with bramble and weed. Wattled hurdles replaced the gate, which had gone from its posts; and to one side and along the rear stretched a small wood mainly of saplings interspersed with a few old trees. The line of the thatched roof was somewhat bent, and in the loosened straw here and there birds had made burrows for nests. Though neglected and derelict the place was not uncomely; the barn itself had goodly beams, and the noble proportions belonging to old farm buildings.

"Why've you let it get like this," inquired Jane, "you, the landlord?"

"You have before you," said Mr. Hebron, "a victim of Free Trade. Once all these fields were corn-land; now that no longer pays, and the barn is useless."

"I should have thought that one like you would have gone on growing corn for the beauty of it."

"That," replied her companion, "is the only argument that would have appealed to me; but no one ever said it before."

"It would have given you joy," she told him.

They entered the barn; a place of gloom within its fastened shutters. Up among the heavy beams patches of daylight were showing: yet in the main it seemed dry.

"Ah, that's beautiful!" said Jane. "I've had it all in my mind's eye: it's what I prayed for."

"You believe in prayer, Mrs. Sterling?"

"Only thing I do believe in," she replied. "Ah, it's a powerful stimulant, used rightly—better than many cups of tea, I've found it: though I like tea too, I must say."

Mr. Hebron seemed pleased. "I am glad to find you are so human," he said. "I like tea too; but unfortunately I like it green—which, my doctor tells me, is bad for me. Now, what do you recommend in my case?"

"Change your doctor," said Jane, "if you don't believe him."

"But I do."

"Then if you was to say every day, so as everybody about you could hear, 'God, teach me to know what a fool I am!'—and naming green tea as the reason—well, you'd cure yourself of your weakness for it before they'd done laughing at you."

"No, no!" protested Mr. Hebron, "of my taking of it, perhaps: but of my weakness for it, never!"

"Of your weakness for it," reiterated Jane. "D'you reckon as the soldier whose legs want to run away with him but whose sense won't let him, is weak because of his legs?"

"Yes, if they tremble under him."

"Bridges tremble when you walk on 'em," said Jane; "and they wouldn't be so strong, so I'm told, if they didn't. Look after the senses, and the legs'll look after themselves. Or won't you believe me?"

"I will believe you have the better of the argument and I of the facts. Life is not always logical in its conclusions."

"No," said Jane bluntly; "for you may drink tea and know its bad for you, and yet not be the fool you sound like."

"Yours," said Mr. Hebron, "is a testimonial that I greatly value. When are we to become neighbours?"

"When can you let me have the barn?"

"You may walk in when the spirit moves you."

"Are you going to mend the roof for me?"

"No, I am not." He spoke gently but decidedly. "I shall make a clause forbidding it. That barn is waiting to come down. The roof so long as it lasts shall be the bond of our covenant. If you choose to live under it you shall have it rent free."

"Now that's handsome!" said Jane; "at least, so far as it goes."

"I admit," he replied, "that I only offer you the premises on a distinctly expiring lease. By the time they

become untenable I have no doubt that I shall have tired—not of you, ma'am, but of your following; and if so, I trust that by then they will have tired of living there. Let that be our bargain. Do you want an agreement? ”

“ It wouldn't be any use to me,” said Jane, “ going to law with fellow-Christians being against what I hold for the truth.”

“ It is many years since I was called a fellow-Christian,” remarked Mr. Hebron : “ but the taint is still in me, and contact with certain people brings it out as a sort of nettle-rash. No, we shall not go to law with each other. I only want your undertaking that you will not repair the roof yourself. If I find that I like your community as much as I like you, the roof—well, I shouldn't wonder if the roof repaired itself.”

He put his head meditatively to one side. “ I don't see why God should be the only person to answer prayer, if you'll excuse my saying so ? ”

CHAPTER IX

EVERLASTING HABITATIONS

THE migration of the Jokers from eastern county to west gave them a great advertisement; and their march was conducted not as a retreat but as a triumph. Jane had ploughed a furrow across England, and this was the seed-sowing.

Great crowds attended at the places where they encamped, and listened to her strange doctrine. At that time she was giving six or seven preachments a day; for wherever any stood to listen, or sent word of invitation, there was the call.

One record of her preaching during this short spell of publicity remains over, and bears curious witness to the way in which incidents of daily life supplied material for her ministry of the Word. It was taken from her lips, as spoken, by a young newspaper reporter out for copy; and though his paper did not publish it, the record remains.

Jane arrived late at the meeting, having tramped twelve miles from her last stopping-place. Other Jokers had arrived before her, and with their hymns and exercises were giving diversion to the crowd; but all turned quickly about, and ranged themselves anew, when from the steps of a raised pavement a bare-headed woman began speaking.

"Did not our hearts burn within us by the way?" were her first words, delivered without preliminary. "Whose hearts does that mean? Yours; mine? What have hearts got to burn for? Love of God. What's to feed 'em to it? Love of man. If there's any one here, man, woman, or child, has got a heart as won't burn—the love of God is not in 'em, nor the love of man neither.

And as that's so with us now, it's all through our lives. Any day as your heart don't burn is a day turned from God, and a shutting of your eyes to the beauty He would open before 'em.

"Have you seen no water running to a brook?—out of a drain-pipe, maybe: but it makes its own voice of merri-ment. Have you seen no child playing by a cottage door, or sucking from its mother's breast? Have you seen no old man sit peaceful, his life's work done? Have you never seen stone-breaker strike fire from flint, so that the sparks fly? Is there fire in stone, but no fire in your heart now? Have you ever passed a heap of stones after sunset when the air's gone cool, and felt, as you passed, the heat of the day's hours strike out of them? And have you no heat to give back to Him for all His blessings? Have you seen a glow-worm put up its tail for its mate like a green star in the grass? And haven't you got a light to show to God, the true mate of every man and woman that's born?

"Why haven't your hearts burned? Have you seen no wrong done in the day, that your hearts haven't burned?—no man beating a horse as was doing its best: no poor fool fouling his own life, or the life of others; no black coat and waistcoat as buttons behind, carrying the gospel of peace like a candle under an extinguisher, a walking nightmare to all he meets? Have you seen no house where no folks ought to be put to live? Have you seen no folly or cruelty done in the eye of day—no weakness of the strong—no helplessness of them that need succour—that your hearts haven't burned?

"What are ye made of, all of ye? Have you got no drop of the blood of the Lamb flowing in your veins, singing in your ears the new song—'I am the vine, and ye are the branches!' Ah! you can lop and lop, you can cut off the green leaves, and the twists, and the blossoms, and the fruit; but you can't never cut yourself off from Him. You haven't got a knife as could do it, so don't try!

"I was trying to cut myself off from Him one day, without knowing it; for there was that in my heart that

wanted to take me where He wouldn't be. I'd plenty of reason for it, so I thought : I'd longings too. But as I went along the way. He come and walk by me—He was there, but I couldn't see His face : I didn't want to. He spoke to me, and I answered Him quick and sharp ; but for everything I said, His word was quicker than mine. I couldn't argue like what He could : it took me more words to do it ; and when I'd said it, it wasn't done. Aye ! for every score words of mine He said but one ; and all the time, though His spirit spoke not, never did He let me go.

"That day I was angry with a man. And because I was angry with that one, I remembered all them as had ever done wrong to me : and because I hated him, I hated all.

"But what He said to me was this : 'Next man you meet is Me. Do to him the will of Him that sent you !'

"The next man Him ? Who was it ? 'Twasn't a man, 'twas a woman. She stole my shoes and run off with 'em. Well ; I didn't do it all at once ; I ran after her. But I couldn't catch her : that made me laugh. Afterwards I came on her when she didn't expect : she'd got 'em on then ; but I let her keep 'em.

"Who did that do harm to ? Who did it do good to ? I've thought of them shoes often since : and it's always made me laugh. For it's because of that woman as we are marching across England to-day.

"When my feet go tired, when I'm feeling a bit down, I pray as those shoes mayn't never wear out, not from the woman's feet, nor from her mind : for I give 'em to her with a word as she could remember.

"She done the Lord's work in me ; she a thief, and not a penitent one at that, either. But I'd forgiven every one when I'd forgiven her : I hadn't any anger against man left in me then. The Lord's fire in my heart had burned it away.

"Little children, love one another ! I've nothing newer to say to you than that. It's love makes the world go round, they say : and though sometimes it seems a round world in a hard square hole, still it do go round somehow, and we get to the other side. But don't make the mistake

of thinking that love is a easy thing to begin with. It's the hardest thing of all till you know how to start : but it gets easier as time goes on. And when you love everybody, so as you'd only do 'em good and wish 'em joy, it makes you to laugh ! Aye ! and to see 'em running away from you, like that woman as was doing the Lord's work in me, that's the funniest thing in all the world !

“And that's what God sees every day : what man's doing to Him. Don't you think it must make Him laugh ?

“Isn't that a reason why all hearts must burn ? You must either burn to joy or you must burn to pain : and either way it'll be the Lord's doing. For He went down afore you into Hell, and He'll go there after you. However you deny Him He'll still be with you : never will He let you go.

“Why ? Because He can't live without you—hear that!—any more than you can live without Him. We've our blind days and we've our days for seeing ; but God ain't never blind.

“Once my heart was sore stricken ; and because of it my eyes were blind, for in my arms I was carrying a dead child. But a man passed me on the road : I didn't know him, he didn't know me. He said, ‘It's a fine day.’

“That was the Lord's word in me : it opened my eyes, for it was true ! And I saw then that you can't never lose the part, if only you've got the whole. The dear things we keep, the dear things we lose !—keep, and lose—you can't keep 'em like He can ; you can't lose 'em when you've learned to find they're with Him.

“You've got to see God in the land of the living, else you won't never see Him at all. You've got to give back to Him the joy He made, when he breathed life into man's heart and called it good. But how are we to have light to see—and how are we to have joy to find—and how are we to give back to Him the fire of His spirit, if our hearts don't burn within us by the way ? ”

Jane ended as abruptly as she had begun, and disappeared into the crowd.

There can be no doubt that by the vividness of her language she impressed people, however little her actual

message might carry weight. "She doesn't preach like anybody else," said one who about that time heard her. "It's always like a bit out of her own life; and when you have once heard it you can't ever forget."

Probably it was upon this pilgrimage that Jane got her biggest crowds, and was listened to with most attention. This march across England of a hundred homeless souls had managed to impress people. They carried with them their food, their tents, and their household goods, in lorries without horses; and living frugally, with supplementary hospitality accorded by the way, arrived at their destination within a fortnight of setting out having something still to the good for the hungry days which lay ahead of them.

At this, as at other crises of their fate, they broke into song; and when their new home sheltered them, inspiration became insistent and had to be recognized.

There still exists, within reach for collection by the curious, a small red hymn-book of twenty pages roughly bound, containing some of the poetic effusions written by the community on this and on earlier occasions. They were mostly composed during Jane's absence; and though few of them could be called good, she forbade nothing so long as it struck the right note.

Whatever their defects, these 'Songs of Paradise,' made by the Birds, were at all events twitterings of a cheerful character, and so, good for the heart. Jane did not pretend to be a literary critic; seeing that they were a labour of love she passed them. She found then that the name she had so off-handedly bestowed had been accepted in real earnest; and from this time forward 'Birds of Paradise' they continued to call themselves. The title stands enshrined in their literature, and is the only one, of the many showered on them, which the community may be said to have officially adopted.

The poem containing it occupies first place in the community's hymn-book, and runs thus:

*Ye Birds of Paradise remember,
The twenty-seventh of last December,*

*When in eighteen hundred and seventy-four
Ninety-nine people were turned out of door.
And yet they sang—we'll swell the song—
That the Lord will come and fetch us along.*

*As in the road they all did stand,
No shelter had this pilgrim band ;
But their hands were linked together in love ,
And their hearts were lit by the light above ;
And thus they sang—we'll swell the song—
The Lord will come and fetch us along !*

*From half-past five that night were seen
Storms of rain with sleet between :
Their boots were thin, and their clothes were porous,
But still they sang in joyful chorus,
“ Oh, now is the time—come, swell the song !—
For the Lord Himself to fetch us along ! ”*

*They said to themselves, “ Who cares for the weather ?
Here we be all of us birds of a feather.”
And so they spread their plumes to the night,
And lifted abroad their wings for flight,
And as they went, they swelled the song !—
“ The Lord has come to fetch us along.”*

*And now, behold, that small migration
Has become a very large congregation ;
And if that don't prove that the Bible's true ;
You'd better begin and write it new.
And still we sing—come, join the song !—
The Lord hath been to fetch us along.*

*For the Lord came down in His great bounty,
And guided our feet to another county,
And brought us safe to a big barn
Right in the middle of a field of corn,
And there we sing—oh, swell the song !—
The Lord hath come to fetch us along.*

"Aye, that's right!" said Jane, with commendation when she had heard it. "It's in the right spirit: barring that I don't see that large congregation as you talk about; nor the field of corn either."

"Ah! but we shall have them, Mother," said Jacob. "Oh, depend upon it! We sung that with the eye of faith. For now unto us do the Gentiles seek, and our rest shall be glorious. Have not the Lord set His hand a second time to recover the remnant of His people?"

Jane left him to his quotations: for when the word of the Lord descended upon Jacob there was no other way of stopping him.

The glorious rest he promised was not to be theirs yet. Tents were up, the old barn had become a hive of industry, and in the adjoining field, on the side of the plantation next the sun, wooden sheds were building.

The congregation entered their new dwelling-place with uplifted hearts. After so much roughing it in a most inclement season, the big barn seemed a veritable palace to them. Brother Jacob was full of it, and had a thankful word to say on the first day of assembly. Mr. Hebron had been to see them in the dark, standing rather aloof on the outskirts of the camp, and had afterwards sent Jane a cartload of farm produce with his best compliments.

"Behold," said Jacob, "how this day the Scripture is fulfilled in us. We have made friends with the mammon of unrighteousness; and they have received us into everlasting habitations."

"Everlasting?" said Jane. "There's a hole in the roof already; and you ain't going to stop that from getting bigger by calling it a habitation. Brother Jacob is one of them that think as our Lord never made a joke or spoke sarcastic; and that's why the churches have gone on making friends of the mammon of unrighteousness ever since. Fine everlasting habitations that's brought 'em!

"The things as man can't alter to spoil," she went on, "those are the only everlasting habitations that I know. You can't alter the song of the thrush; you can't alter the leaves of a tree; you can't make a stream flow backward

away from itself; you can't make the summer and the winter be different to what they are. You can scare off the bird, you can strip off the leaf, you can dam up the stream, you can shut out God's seasons from your heart, and coddle yourself up from 'em. But you can't make the life of 'em be different to what He made 'em. The only habitations that be everlasting are them that move swiftly to do His will, that don't set 'emself up against Time, the great river of God, flowing on till it finds Eternity. If you dwell in these, and take hold of them with all your hearts, you possess the earth. But for that you've got to be meek : Riches won't give it you."

So to her dispossessed following she preached possession. And they in a mood of exaltation, but not perhaps with any more real understanding, received her word as a new inspiration from on high.

Having the right spirit of a chosen people they regarded their exodus as a great affair—magnified it, and were ready at the least prompting from Jane to endorse it with miracle.

But miracle in the particular Jane would have none of, though in the universal sense she embraced it without limit. "Seeking a sign?" she exclaimed. "Where would you have us begin? Haven't the Lord set His sign on each one of us? Haven't He bowed His love into grains of dust? Find something that isn't a miracle: you'll have cause to wonder then."

Failing to discover so monstrous a vacuum, they broke out into another hymn. In full cluck, when incubation was over, the Birds brought their product to Jane. The hymn-book was then growing apace.

*Oh, come and join the cherubs,
And with the seraphs sing,
Your city that was Herod's
Now holds a heavenly King.*

*Oh, give your hearts to laughter,
Because the Lord is good :
Ye sought Him at Ephrata,
And found Him in the wood.*

*We struck a path for freedom,
As it was right to do ;
And going forth from Edom
We cast away our shoe.*

*Though thorns had made our pots hot,
With foes around like bees,
Now Moab is my wash-pot ;
I'll do there as I please.*

*About our pathway rumour
Was like a two-edged sword ;
But still in cheerful humour
We marched to serve the Lord.*

*Our banner bold unfurling
We crossed the sea dry-shod,
And went with Mother Sterling
To the Wilderness of God.*

*And now in this firm fortress
We sing and we adore,
With Mother Jane for portress,
Please God for evermore.*

*So lift the shout of laughter,
And let the welkin ring,
And raise to roof and rafter
The praises of our King !*

“ Well, you are proud of yourselves,” said Jane ; “ any one can see that ; and it’s full of good things like a dog of fleas. But just you leave me out of it, as I’ve told you before. You can find a better rhyme to ‘ furling ’ if you ask the Spirit to guide you. And who’s been telling you as I ain’t going to die ?—‘ evermore ’ indeed ! That’s got to come out too. And what’s a ‘ welkin ’ ? A shell-fish o’ sorts, ain’t it ? You’ve been seeing that by the eye of faith : we haven’t crossed no sea that I know of, dry-shod, nor otherwise.”

Nevertheless, in a shortened form, the hymn duly appeared. Jane had her way, and 'Mother Sterling' was left out: 'The Spirit bore us whirling' took its place, and was held upon second thoughts to be a distinct improvement.

The book went to press in the first year of the community's change of locality; and having thus seen itself in print the Muse grew quiet and satisfied. Before long the Birds of Paradise had started singing in a new way of their own, independently of words. It suited them better, helping their minds to soar to yet higher altitudes.

"So long as it keeps 'em happy," said Jane, "I don't mind what they do."

They were then undergoing their hardest experience: for fifteen weeks none but the children had a full meal; but the spirit of peace remained to them, and Jane's joy in them was great.

CHAPTER X

THE TABLE OF TESTIMONY

AFTER that brief flare of publicity, people heard little of Jane and her community : they passed unconsidered out of view ; and so far as the general public was concerned ceased thenceforth to have a history.

But an outsider's account put on record a few years afterwards gives, not unsympathetically, a view of their life under settled conditions in the new home.

Mr. Hilary Whitshaw, in his "Rambles through Nine Counties," writes as follows : "April 9, 1876. Leaving my night's lodging at Willtree, where after sound sleep and a good breakfast I found I must clean my own shoes, there being no man or maid on the premises, I turned westward by an upward way, easy of ascent, and thenceforward had forest-border country before me.

"At ten o'clock I was reminded of the day from a village steeple in the valley below, and ten minutes later was counting a peal of five bells with others yet to come, from the more distant spire of Ilmington lying east. A marvellous industry, if you think of it, is this bell-ringing from week to week, so old, and hitherto so largely voluntary : nor do those who practise it account it monotonous, as do some of the ears that hear it. I am told that in all the steeples hereabouts they have their Sabbath beer doled out in the belfry, a fixed measure as payment, and thence go down to service neatly primed for the sleep that comes on them at sermon-time.

"Within that same hour on my forward journey, I came on another exercise that greatly pleased me, having heard tell of it but never yet encountered. It struck on my ear

from the walls of an old barn that stood shadowed over in trees, and sounded first like the humming of a large swarm, or the song of telegraph wires. But presently I perceived that it contained unisons and harmonies, and went in a progression, now rising, now falling, as though a gathering of tops set to various paces had built up a movable chord between them, subtly changing its intervals from the major to the minor, the third to the fourth or fifth, and in this Æolian cadence having something of the elation of the thrashing-machine as it bears its sheaves to its bosom.

"I already knew that I was in the locality whither had come, a year or two since, the Jokers and their high-priestess, fresh and famous from camping with dogged obstinacy on the roadside to which a long-suffering landlord had evicted them. And here, in the weather-beaten flesh and in full song—though for most of them the pairing season seemed well over—they were still to be found.

"The pleasant method of their melody so attracted me that, greatly daring, I ventured into their midst—to the extent at least of standing in the aperture of the half-open door, whence I could see, ranged within on benches without backs, three score or so of clean sober-looking people, with eyes fast shut and bodies gently swaying to the rhythm of their song: each one intently humming a note of the common chord.

"Their priestess, a tall gaunt woman (grey-headed, and wearing a bright but faded shawl) indifferent as it seemed to their noise, was busy at the far end cooking the family dinner.

"For nearly a quarter of an hour, as I stayed and watched, no change in the congregational exercise took place. They continued to hum with closed eyes, obviously enjoying themselves; the swaying of their bodies increased, and the humming—in steady crescendo—took a wider range of intervals up and down. They kept tune surprisingly.

"When this diversion had subsided to a pleased murmur, the attuned congregation received its reward. The priestess lifted the lid from her caldron, and letting the savour go forth (Irish stew, I detected, as the stepping-stone on this

occasion for ascent to higher things) started to expound the word of the new gospel in an easy conversational tone very unlike the ordinary mode of preaching. I must admit that her curious homeliness of phrase was winning and attractive, except when it verged, now and again, too closely on undue familiarity with sacred things.

"It certainly riveted the attention of her congregation: indeed, in the very matter of her discourse, one may say that she held them by the throat.

" 'What are you all waiting for?' she turned suddenly to inquire, when silence had held them for a while. 'Is it the Lord, or is it your dinner you're wanting? And which do you think you want most?' She played the comparison very ingeniously, and was well down to the intelligence of her audience in the domestic parable thus set visibly before them.

" 'Which of them would you soonest do without for a day?' she went on: 'or how much could you stomach of the one if you hadn't got a bit of the other to help you? Praying on an empty stomach has helped me often: but I didn't keep my stomach empty for the purpose like some folk do. That's a tempting of Providence.' Whereupon she expounded very sensibly man's dependence upon spiritual things to get value out of the material, and conversely on material things in order that he may reach to the spiritual. It was excellent anti-Manichee doctrine; and for all her gaunt leanness one could detect that she was no ascetic at heart.

"It is said, I do not know with what truth, that the community discourages matrimony, holding in common other things besides worldly possessions. This may be an uncharitable gloss upon the lack of ceremony with which, Quaker-like, they celebrate their marriages; but the place certainly did not swarm with children sufficiently young to have been born to the common stock since the sect became locally established. Parents had apparently brought their previous begettings with them and therewith were content. Two I saw, little girls of six or seven, nursing rag-dolls, quite unrebuked through hymn-singing and preachings;

and at one moment the Mother stopped abruptly in her preaching to describe vividly and in detail the movements of two birds which through the window she could see nest-making on a bough outside.

“The children all turned and craned their necks trying to see; and the Mother, calling them up to her, took the smallest, set her upon the table at her side, and thus, with pointings, continued her discourse; pairing, nesting, egg-laying, feeding and flight she set forth in due order. There was much life and humour in the description, and the intrinsic interest of the thing was left without pious parable to deduce its own moral. ‘And now,’ she said, ‘you can all go out quietly and watch them—or not, just as you like. And you, Tommy’—to one small urchin—‘don’t you be throwing stones.’

“They came running out, looking at me big-eyed and curious as they passed: and a sort of shame, thus to be seen standing an eavesdropper and apart, drove me away.

“We smile at these people who, wandering out into the curtailed wilderness of this overpopulated country, have found a tabernacle for their faith, and a ritual to fit in with it different from all others. But I thought the pot of savoury stew as an ingredient to public worship showed shrewdness; for I reminded myself how culinary was the hold maintained over the Israelites by priests under the Mosaic law; and how, by keeping control over the flesh-pots, they kept control over other things also, extending thereby a domestic influence which the Established Church, in spite of bread doles and blankets on certain days of the year, has ceased to exercise.

“Only in one material respect, so far as I know, does this nest of Jokers resemble other incumbencies: they have a patron. The gift of the living—of the barn, that is to say—lies in the hands of Mr. Barnaby Hebron, the well-known exponent of autocratic anarchy. He, hoping that this patriarchal object-lesson may serve as an illustration to his thesis, has given to their floating ark an anchorage on his estate.

“I do not hear that they make many proselytes, but they

are reported sober and industrious, and though by their manner of living they avoid the payment of taxes, they rob no hen-roosts. The country-folk around regard them as amiably mad; but the farmers are no longer above employing them, having found their turn-out to be good. And since the world holds so many much worse people, their oddity does not deprive them of my respect. The grotesque may have its place in religion as well as in art. Doubtless their creed would suit neither my well-educated reader nor me; but it has given them not only a cheerful countenance but also a glad heart—if those inarticulate hummings, as they thrashed the matter out of it, be an indication, as would seem, of contentment within.”

Mr. Hilary Whitshaw had secured for himself the reputation of a selective latitudinarian, and his testimonial, bestowed with a twinkle of condescension, carried amusement but little weight. It was his rôle to write charitably of things he did not in the least agree with.

The Joker ritual, of which we have his single description, was as a matter of fact very variable. Nothing under Jane’s management ever became quite stereotyped; and the community came to the performance of its worship with a sense almost of adventure, like a child to a bran pie. “We never know where she’s going to have us!” they confessed; and the unexpectedness of it gave them joy. Divine things came on them as a discovery; and “O Lord, show us the humour of it!” remained the standing text of their lives.

Before the eyes of the congregation, between them and the fireplace, stood the Table of Testimony. This was Jane’s pulpit. She did not herself speak from it, but other things did. On this altar, by concrete examples she attuned the minds of her community to the beauty of holiness. Her system, if she had one, was the system of object-lessons. “You have to see a thing so as to know it,” she said. “You may talk about it for ever.” The Table was to help them to see themselves.

“Let any one as would be honest,” she said one day, when some dispute over the ownership of personal effects

had arisen, "put on that table the thing they'd be least willing to lose. Shall we do it all together, or one at a time?"

"You'd better give us time to think, Mother," said Jacob; "we be all joined to idols, and it means a great searching of hearts for some of us."

"One at a time then," assented Jane, "let the innocent speak first, and when we've seen with our eyes we'll ask the Lord to show us why we should all be so loath. Who's going to begin?"

There was an awkward pause: no one rose. "What," she inquired, "has nobody here got nothing they'd be loath to part from? Are ye so perfect? What were ye two squabbling about yesterday? Bill Jones, have you got nothing in your pocket?"

"I've got a pipe," said Bill Jones. "I ain't going to give that up."

"There's honesty for you!" cried Jane. "Put it on the Table, and let's look at it."

Bill hesitated, eyeing the Mother with a timidly calculating glance—for truly you could not be sure of her.

"You'll give it me back, Mother?" he bargained.

"I'll give it ye back," she promised him, "and a plug of tobacco to go with it."

Bill advanced and laid his pipe on the Table.

"That's honest so far," said Jane. "Here's the thing Bill Jones loves best in the world; and I don't wonder: it's what he breathes by. Yet some of us couldn't breathe through it to save our lives, not without being sick. It's a Lord's mercy we don't all have to seek grace same way as he does. For it's grace you get by it, else you wouldn't be so loath to part from it, would you Bill?"

"Mebbe not," he answered, still eyeing her in doubt.

"Right! Now here's the verse of a hymn for you. Say it after me!

*"Whatever, Lord, I lend to Thee,
Repaid a thousand-fold will be:
Then gladly will I give to Thee,
Who givest all."*

Bill repeated the words sheepishly.

"Amen," finished Jane.

"Amen," responded Bill.

"Anybody 'ud say 'Amen' on those terms," she then remarked: "that's a Jew's bargain, and them as can't give to the Lord with joy without expecting profit by it, ought to be ashamed of 'emselves. What did you say it for?"

"You told me, Mother."

"Yes: so as the better to remember not to say it again—or think it, any of us."

"Now," she went on, setting a chair, "sit down before the face of the congregation, and let 'em look at you. There's Bill for you: and there's the thing he loves best in the world. Lord show us the humour of it!"

With some three score pairs of eyes directed against him Bill sat uneasily shifting his feet, and wiping his mouth with his hand. Presently out of sheer awkwardness he spat.

"Your pipe behaves better than you do," said Jane.

He turned and fixed upon it a wistful eye, and so rested a while. Then consciousness drew him back to his fellows, then to Jane, the author and finisher of his faith.

She gazed upon him earnestly. "Is the Lord finding you, Bill?" she inquired.

He wagged his head ponderously: his time was not yet. A voice rose from the body of the assembly.

"That ain't his pipe: it's mine."

"He broke mine, I took his," said Bill defensively.

"Sing glory!" cried Jane. "The Lord's coming to his own now."

"I didn't break it," protested the other. "He put it for me to sit down on."

"Bill, you might have hurt him!" said Jane.

"He broke my pipe, so I took his," reiterated Bill.

"O Window of Light," began Jane, "look down upon these two men, as loves one pipe between 'em better than they love Thee! Look at 'em as they ought to be looked at, and show us the humour of 'em!"

She turned to her victim: "There's your plug of tobacco,

Bill ; take it, and smoke it in the face of the congregation, and the Lord make it sweet to you."

Bill took the pipe, and slowly started filling it.

"Now we'll sing a hymn," said Jane. And while they did so the pipe controversy solved itself.

When Jane started to preach, telling the men they might all smoke, she presented Bill with a new one ; and that day her discourse was about tobacco.

Then, and always, the Table of Testimony continued to supply her with texts. One day, having to speak on pride, she again called for sacrifices ; and a certain Brother Timothy in proud humility took off his wig and sat bare to be gazed on. "O Lord," said Jane, "this man hath put off all covering from his head, and cometh afore Thee in nakedness. Yet, if he be honest he will own that he would rather put off his wig than his trousers. Lord, teach him and us to see the humour of it !"

Among the men, the fighting spirit occasionally recurred ; and having no longer the Hill of Difficulties to take them to, the Table of Testimony became her last resort. But she was never in a hurry to intervene, and her queer way was to try and settle a matter in the first place without hearing the rights or the wrongs from either disputant.

One day two men fell to fighting with their fists, and for a while seemed to be enjoying themselves. Jacob smote his hands together, and with his mouth full of texts came running to Jane for succour. She took a look at them.

"Ah, they've both took off their coats to it," she remarked : "they've got their minds set on it, right enough."

She came with her knitting and stood near, watching them. "When you've quite done," she said presently, as cautious tactics began to take the place of rash offensive.

Finding the eye of calm judgment on them, they were no longer so anxious to go on ; yet neither was willing to be the first to leave off. So, as they sparred, they denounced each other that the Mother might hear and judge.

"Oh, don't argue about it !" said Jane. "Fighting ain't reasoning, you know. Go and get done with it ; don't mind me ! Fight away !"

But though the stomach for fighting was gone, their minds not yet being attuned to peace, they reverted the more furiously to dialectics.

"Well, of all silly things in the world!" exclaimed Jane. "You fight, and you talk too! What's the use of it? If you are going to decide by which is the stronger, it's tomfoolishness to argue which is in the right." (A counsel of wisdom which the nations of the earth have yet to learn). Then, as the contest of tongues started once more, "Look here!" she interjected, "either you'll go on fighting, or you leave this business to me. Will you hold your tongue, James?"

James did so. Then she said:

"We'll have you two at the Table of Testimony. Go and wash your faces!"

Half an hour later the two culprits were at the Table with the community gathered behind, for so had Jane disposed them.

"Sit down with your backs to the congregation," she said, "for you ain't fit to be looked at." Then, turning to the waiting assembly. "Behold two just men made perfect. Let's hear what they've got to say for themselves. Start away, James."

But James, facing neither his antagonist nor his audience, could not utter the explanatory word! She offered the other his turn, with a like result.

"Well," she remarked coolly, "I'm not saying anything myself yet. But when a man's been a fool, either he knows it, or he's got to be told." She paused. "James, have you got to be told?"

The congregation waited on his answer. After a moment of deliberation it came.

"You can hold your row, Missus," said the man."

"That's right," said Jane cheerfully. "And what about you, Tom?"

"You can hold your row too," said Tom elliptically.

"That's all we've got to do," said Jane—"hold our rows. Well, there's the Table of Testimony. Give it a turn round! That'll fix it in your minds."

The ceremony was gone through.

"I don't think the worse of neither of you," said Jane. "Fighting's pretty to begin with, but it don't last pretty. And if people could only find out when to stop, like you have, the world 'ud be nearer its senses than it seems like to-day."

Thus the Table of Testimony became a Table of Truth. When mere words failed to get home, she set example before them.

One day it was a flagon of ale ; for more than all else the drink question divided them, and Jane's communal solution, based on an examination of how much the community could spare to each in equal portion after providing for the necessities of life, satisfied neither the toppers nor the teetotallers. She lost followers, on both sides, because of it, but persisted in her allowance. Given the communal object-lesson, human nature must take its own time to reform itself : if it could not be satisfied within communal limits discipline became due.

The defection took its course on characteristic lines. The extreme temperance section left first : they would not pay, they said, for the indulgence of sin in others. "We all do," said Jane ; nor could she see life under any other condition.

The toppers followed with hesitancy and regret, and mainly from a sense of shame that they did not bring all their wages to the common store. Jane had known of it, but would not reproach them : the lean days of the community sufficed to bring the lesson home ; and when at last they departed it was a sort of a triumph for her, though a sad one. The unclean beast still attracted her ; she preferred its motive to the motives of those who saw no need of a physician.

This double separation reduced her following by twenty, and none came to take their place. Jane's travelling days were over ; she no longer went out into the highways and byways to compel her human material to come in. The family life had taken hold of her. "I went to them once," she said. "Now they must come to me."

Perhaps she spoke not knowing herself, merely as circumstances seemed to show. For though rheumatism, her first ailment, had now begun to take hold of her, yet had the call come she would have tramped a hundred miles to meet it.

CHAPTER XI

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

JANE'S search for a new domicile had landed her fifteen miles short of her first objective. In the early days of the settlement members of that smaller community had paid her a visitation and were wishful to join forces. But the Mother dissuaded them.

"If folk let you live at peace with them," she said, "you are doing the Lord's work in their midst."

She had not drawn her following out of the world from any sense of a superior holiness, but for one purpose alone—to nourish joy in them. "For this time," she said, when they held their first meeting in common, "the Lord hath guided us together, but He may yet guide us apart, into ways unknown."

This seemed to many of them an undoing of the work that had been wrought in them; but Jane would not have it so. "Have you less faith," she asked, "than the grains of seed that the sower scatters from his hand? The Lord's furrow is everywhere."

"Some fell by the wayside, Mother," Jacob reminded her.

"The Lord's furrow," said Jane, "is in the craw of a bird just as much as in the loam of a field." She told them how, by the migration of birds, islands in mid-ocean had become fertile; and that little bit of natural history did much to strengthen their faith; the one seed so guided outweighed in their estimate the innumerable other seeds destined to be lost. For that is Nature's way; and man also, if he will be reasonable, may have a mind to it, and keep smiling as she does. That Jane saw. Her faith in

separation was soon to be tested. The head members of the little community with which occasionally she exchanged visits one day said to her, "We are going away from you, Mother."

"The Lord bless it to you," said Jane.

"My wife's father's died," her informant explained, "and has left a little farm away in the midlands, with fifteen years' lease still to run. We are all going to it."

"The Lord keep it to you," said Jane.

"Maybe we shan't see you again, Mother," remarked one sorrowfully.

"I shall always see you," said Jane.

They saw her eyes full of vision as she spoke: and she blessed them fervently at parting. "Her eyes shone on us that last time," they said, telling of it afterwards; and though in a while they ceased to be known as 'Birds of Paradise,' they kept a memory of her, and the farm prospered.

On her return journey as she neared the tower, Jane came on Mr. Hebron standing by a wayside pond, watching a hen and her brood of ducklings.

"I have just been to see you," he said, "and feared I was going to miss you. They didn't know when you would be back."

"It's good for 'em not to know sometimes," said Jane.

"You think separation has its medicinal values? Well, it was about that I was coming to you. But *she* doesn't think so." He pointed to the object-lesson at their feet.

The hen was projecting herself in agitated jerks against the water's edge: loud as Lord Ullan's was her complaint at this getting away of her adopted progeny.

"Outraged motherhood!" commented Mr. Hebron in a tone of placid compassion; "another of those unnatural crimes against the individual temperament perpetrated by society for its convenience."

"Mothers don't have a daisy time ever, it seems to me," said Jane. "This one's only got her lesson a bit earlier than most. Don't you doubt but she'll learn it."

"You think mothers are teachable?" inquired Mr. Hebron.

"Teachable? I don't," replied Jane. "Goose and donkey rolled into one, most of 'em: but it gets ground into 'em; and the sooner the better to my thinking. Next hatch she'll expect it of 'em."

"That may be a tragedy also," demurred her companion. "Once I saw the process reversed. A duck was given a hen's eggs to put life into; she hatched them with unsuspicious alacrity, but between the evening and the morning of the fourth or fifth day lost her temper over the results, pushed them all into the water and drowned them. The sight of the six little dead bodies seemed to cause her no grief. Heartless would you call that?"

"Dead's dead," said Jane. "I don't blame anybody for not fussing over what's done with. It's life we've got to care about."

"Ducks seem to me to have more sense of humour than hens," observed Mr. Hebron, off at a tangent. "That is why I like them better, I suppose."

"I knew one as hadn't," said Jane, hostile to the claim. "It's only their flat beaks as deceives you: they've more lip like: it gives 'em a smile. That one as I tell of, fell into a well; and, of course, begins wanting to be fetched up again. Two mortal hours they went on letting down the bucket for her to get into; but empty or full it was all the same to her—round and round she spraddled—into it—no!

"Once she got there by mistake, but they hadn't got her a foot of the way up before out she jumps—triumphant. You could hear her talking of it. That made 'em lose patience with her, them as was on the job. 'Let 'er drown then!' says they; and off they go leaving her where she was.

"Well, I was soft-hearted in those days, so I come back off and on, peering down and watching my chance, knowing it had got to end sometime. Five mortal hours she paddled, upright in her own notions of which way to salvation: then all at once, over she goes on her side, done for.

"It took me five minutes to fish her up, even then, and

she was a dead bird when she come to the top, though I tried pump-handling her neck for the best part of an hour after.

"I've often thought of her since when I've seen folk doing foolishly and not able to help it."

"Well, there's humour in the story, anyhow," said Mr. Hebron.

"Ah!" retorted Jane, "there's more of us like that duck than knows. And if we don't see the humour of it, let's hope as others do, and ask God to show it us."

"There must have been something in the bird's mind," mused Mr. Hebron as they moved forward. "I wonder what it was."

"Flat ponds, with shores to 'em, mostly likely; and so set on 'em she couldn't see anything else."

"Would you say that was to be in Hell?"

"If you like; but seeing Heaven all the time."

"That's how most of you people with a religion go through life. To me it would be only an added misery."

"Ah, you've kicked your way out of the bucket, I don't deny," said Jane, suddenly astonishing him; "but we are all after the same thing if we only knew. You'd like a Heaven of your own composing, and a Hell too—if you could hang your own light in 'em. And when you'd got 'em," she added grimly, "you wouldn't know which of 'em you were in. You've got to get out of yourself, that's Heaven."

"Ma'am," said Mr. Hebron, "no man can be in any place that is not of his own composing. To be in it, he must be able to conceive it. We each live in a world of our own."

"Well, if the bottom ever falls out of yours," said Jane, "you'll want a nurse to look after you. It'll be like growing up all over again."

At Mr. Hebron's bidding Jane kept him company into his private demesne. The garden lay above them in terraces; she stayed a moment to gaze up at the tower, and Mr. Hebron preceded her on the steps leading toward the house.

Just as she was following, "Pish!" he cried. "There again!" and backed in sudden disgust. He drew out his handkerchief and wiped his face. Then turning about, "Boy!"—he semaphored benevolently to a corduroyed urchin weeding in the grounds below.

The lad approached with dull interrogating eyes; and Mr. Hebron explained.

"Boy," he said, "there's a spider here which insists on spinning its web across the path; I walk into it every morning. You have dinner, do you not?"

The boy's eyes gaped. Was he going to be told to eat spider? he wondered. "Yes, sir," he replied prayerfully.

"Well, remember every time you come in the morning and every time you go to dinner—you can remember that, can't you?—come this way, and see that the spider's web is broken."

"Won't I better kill it, sir," inquired the lad meekly.

"Kill it! Abominable boy! If you kill it, how will you teach it to behave better? No, we want the creature to learn that webs cannot be spun with impunity across garden paths."

He went on his way, satisfied with this fresh example. "I find it very difficult," he said, "to make people humane and at the same time to preserve liberty. I myself took the trouble only this morning to carry that spider to the other side of the garden: but either it returned or another took its place."

"There's plenty of 'em," said Jane.

"Yes, that is what makes the problem. I believe in assisted emigration. It is that I wanted to talk about."

He led her through the window into his study and there bade her sit down.

"I am afraid," he said, "that monetarily you and your community are not prospering."

"We are having a bit of a time of it," Jane confessed.

"Why is that?"

"We haven't all the workers we used to have; our trades didn't all come with us. Now we are all on the land, and

we haven't a market like what we used to have at Ipsley. That was a large town."

"Are you no longer self-supporting then?"

"In a way—or should be, if we could get a price for the extra we don't want. But there it is: all the farmers round can cut us out. Then lately they've took all our best workers to themselves; though it isn't for much of a wage: still we need the money for buying things."

"It is about your best workers I was going to inquire. You have one or two with quite small families, have you not?"

"We've half a dozen."

"Good workers?"

"They're sober, anyway."

"That counts, of course. How many would you be willing to part with?"

"Any as would be willing to go."

"Canada has a great future before it. Do you think they would go there?"

"I can't say," said Jane. "I'll ask them."

"I have the opportunity, you see," explained Mr. Hebron.

"I belong to an organization. In fact, I founded it."

"When would they have to go?" she inquired.

"Early in the spring."

It was then middle autumn.

"That gives us time," said Jane.

"We have to get the right people. It might mean taking as many as twenty-five, if you could spare so many?"

"I'll spare 'em all if the Lord wants 'em to go elsewhere."

"Who is to decide that?" inquired the other a little disdainfully.

"He will."

Mr. Hebron looked at the untroubled face so much more lined than his own. He was her senior by ten years or more, but he doubted whether he had really lived so long; he had taken so much longer finding himself; and it is from that that life dates.

"Sometimes, ma'am," he said gently, "I am tempted to envy you."

"Don't yield to the temptation," said Jane. "Maybe if you were in my skin, you'd be as miserable as I'd be in yours."

"It was rather your faith in life that I was envying," he explained. "You see so much good in it."

"Aye," said Jane, "and in death too. That's a faith that's been growing in me. You've got to come to it when you get old."

"You don't call yourself old yet, I hope," protested Mr. Hebron ; it was a category he himself did not wish to fall into.

"It's the Lord's planting in you," said Jane, "that makes whether you're old or young. I'm going down into my roots now. Many a thousand miles has He given me feet to walk and to find His ways waiting for me, He's going to show me rest now. I've only walked fifteen miles to-day : and I'm wellnigh tired out. It makes me laugh when I think what I used to do once on a time."

CHAPTER XII

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

THE following spring saw the diminution of Jane's band according to the plan which had been put before them. Economically it was a hard blow, for these were their best workers and had by their labour contributed to the support of others. Some, on whose spirits this dwindling of comfort told, were a little sore because of it. "They've gone to better themselves," they said; and the inference was that those left behind were the less fortunate. A few of the old who had relatives to go to went back to their friends. The Mother sped them with words of cheer and kindness.

From this date on, the numbers of the band steadily declined. The record of that decline, if it is to be true to the informing spirit, must be cheerfully told.

The community had outlived its use. Founded on a co-operative basis to protect Jane's followers in the face of persecution, its *raison d'être* grew less when the wicked ceased from troubling. Only a personal attraction now held together those that remained; and though Jane's spirit was among them, her gift of tongues had not communicated itself to any: elsewhere the spirit might continue, but not the word. Converts did not come to them, and they sent forth no preachers.

There were other matters which caused trouble deeper than might appear. For the children the happy communal life, separate and select, was now over; State education in a Church school had come to claim them, and they must go each day, a distance of more than a mile, to receive in class along with others a training very different in kind to

that which Jane would have provided. The other school-children mocked at them, making them undergo a petty persecution for their oddities of ritual to which the elders were no longer subjected.

This caused grief; and for the sensitive, school became an ordeal. One or two parents because of it accepted work in other neighbourhoods; and Jane could not blame them. Within a year of the departure of the emigrants, numbers had fallen to thirty. Jane went to Mr. Hebron and asked him to take the largest of her fields off her hands. After that the community no longer grew its own corn: they had not the reapers.

During that winter Mr. Hebron offered monetary assistance, which Jane refused, but she accepted gladly at Christmas some gifts in kind which he sent to her. The community was lean but cheerful: and the Mother's spirit of humour had not abated.

Early in the spring a small trouble came unexpectedly to light—the first of its kind that had happened to them: a child was presently to be born to the community, with apparently no father to claim it.

The sense of scandal was great even before word had got about. In the past when light talk had been directed against them, the community, conscious of their integrity, had not cared. But this was true. Some were for sending the girl away; but she and her father belonged to the district; and she had no friends conveniently distant to go to.

Jane stood up to them. "Is this the only thing," she asked, "we are going to be hard about? We've forgive drunkards, we've forgive thieves: aye, we've welcomed them. Ain't we going to welcome life?"

"But this will be a child of sin, Mother?" protested Brother Timothy, shaking his wig solemnly.

"Not if we make it ours."

"Have you questioned her yet, Mother?"

"I'll not do that," said Jane. "We'll put it before the Lord, and see what He says to it."

She gathered the adults of her congregation together,

stood before them at the Table of Testimony, and spoke :

"We've got a child coming to us that hasn't found a father. It's a way they have of coming into the world sometimes. Mothers they can't do without ; but fathers are a luxury. If there's any one here as wants to father it, let him speak."

There was silence in the assembly.

"Well," said Jane, "let all them that won't be father to it get under their seats."

This unexpected order, interpreted as a way to demonstrate innocence, was obeyed by three.

"O Lord !" cried Jane, "here's three innocent men got under their seats ; and seven, as guilty as they can look, a-keeping theirs ! I never saw such a sight. Get up all of you !" This was addressed to the recumbents.

"Now listen to me," she went on. "We ain't going to search into the secrets of hearts : the Lord'll do that in His own way. Who the father is matters to her and to him, and to nobody else, I reckon. But we've got life coming to us, coming to be born in our midst, wanting succour. Are we going to show it the door ? Ain't that young mother to have no joy in her pains, no kind countenance of friends ? Shan't we rejoice over a new soul ? "

She saw heads vigorously shaken ; for in this matter many of her following had been brought up in the strictest sect of the Pharisees.

"We'll be touching uncleanness, Mother, if we do that," objected one. "Haven't the Lord said 'separate yourselves from the evil thing' ? "

"Aye, separate yourselves !" said Jane ; "but see as you don't take the skim and throw away the cream : that's all ! I was a girl, younger than her, when a child come to me. They told me I was to be ashamed of it. I must hide my head. I must look on it as a thing born of evil, and nobody was to know. And because of that I and the child were parted ; we didn't grow up together, for I was only a child myself then. And the sin I see now plain before my eyes, it wasn't the having of the child, it was the

parting, the shame, the putting of it away. Separate yourself from anything but your own flesh and blood ! No woman as ever comes to me for help shall put her child away while I've a hand to reach and fend for her. If you send her away, you send me ! Aye, and you send the Lord too ; His love won't be in you if you do a thing of that sort. But please God I know you better than you know your own selves."

She did apparently, all but two or three. Timothy, his wife, and one other departed ; the rest stayed.

But to all of them this was a strange showing of Jane's past. Some tried not to believe it.

"She spoke according to the spirit," said Jacob, "not according to the flesh. Yea, she spoke unto us in parables."

Sister Mary Anne, being both of an inquiring and an informative disposition, was set on by her brother and a few others to question further of the matter.

She approached the oracle circuitously, having much to deliver which seemed to her of more pressing importance than Jane's own distant past. Presently she came back to them, laden with the results of her mission.

"I was going up the field, when I just met her," she began ; "and I says to her, 'Good morning, Mother,' and she says to me, 'Good morning, Mary Anne.' So then I asked her how her rheumatism was. 'Nicely, thank you,' she said. 'Oh,' I says, 'I'm glad of that.' And I asked her how many potatoes she wanted peeling, so she told me, and she says, 'Get Sally to help you.' And I says, 'Yes, I will.' So I says then, 'I'm very sorry for Sally, and so we are, all of us : and there's somebody as isn't doing the right thing by her, that I do say ; and they ought to have known better, as I dare say they do, if the truth was to be known. But it isn't the first time,' I says, 'a thing like that has happened to a poor girl, nor it won't be the last ; and you know that, Mother, as well as I.' And she says to me, 'You talk to Sally about the potatoes, and leave all the peelings to the pigs.' And I says, 'Yes, Mother, so I will ; and nobody can't say as I ever wastes anything, not without being told to. And what you said, Mother, about throwing

away a child,' I says, 'is quite true : and if I'd ever had one I wouldn't have done it. And I knew a woman once as pretended to have twins, because her own daughter was having a child she didn't ought to have, just at the same time.' So then I says to her, 'Was that right to pretend to have a child as wasn't your own?' and she said she'd never done it herself, so she couldn't say. So I told her then that there was some of us as didn't believe it : and she said to me, 'Believe what?' And I says—'That you ever had a child sooner than you ought to have done : and there's some as says they wouldn't believe it not if you was to say it to 'em twice ; though,' I says, 'I don't go as far as to say that myself.' And she says to me, 'Oh!' And then she helps me to fill the sack with potatoes ; and while she's doing it she says, 'They'd better believe it,' she says : 'it'll 'elp 'em, because it's true.' So then I says 'Oh!' And she says to me, 'You and Sally had better sing hymns while you're doing the potatoes. And if you leave off I shall come and 'elp.' And I'm sure I don't know what she meant by that. But I went and we done the potatoes singing all the time : and that's what she said as sure as I'm standing here. 'They'd better believe it,' she says ; 'it'll 'elp 'em, because it's true.' And the potatoes are on boiling now : and she's there seeing to 'em."

From this and other showings, Jane realized that truth of a kind so personal to herself had struck the community a blow : their notion of her super-sanctity was shaken. It came to her as a reproach, not that she had undeceived them but that she had inadvertently allowed a false legend of her character to grow up in their minds. Had she confessed more openly her human liabilities, they would perhaps have worshipped her with less extravagance, and the abounding mercies more.

Helped by Sally, and the very healthy specimen of humanity she managed to mother, Jane took them in hand for further training. That small community, holding so lightly by possession, could surely afford to treat the world's judgment as a very secondary thing. So long as they solved their own life-problem in mutual service,

bestowing neglect on none, theirs was demonstrably the better way.

But before the summer was over, the world scored a point for the easing of weaker consciences, which Jane could not grudge to them. The missing father of Sally's babe, a young labourer living in the district, made a declaration of conjugal intention; and Sally passed from the community to a home of her own, becoming, like her husband, a member of a Baptist congregation in the locality. A month or two later her father, old Matthew Lorford, joined his only surviving daughter in her new home—being at that time still able to do work sufficient for his keep under the common roof. Having been a Churchman of old, he reverted, mainly for its local convenience, to the familiar place of worship; but now and again, when his legs would carry him, he would still on fine Sunday afternoons pay the Jokers a visit; Sally also would bring her babe, and the friendly relations of the past were not broken.

Meanwhile one or two of the younger men had chosen wives in the neighbourhood who were not willing to enter the community; and when house-room could be found elsewhere there was no reason why they should. The exodus was gradual and uneventful, and its circumstances were not unkind; but none came from without to replace these gradual shiftings of Jane's flock.

The community had had its use; nor was that use altogether over for individuals, when its corporate life had disappeared. One, who lived long after the events here recorded, spoke in old age of the experiences which that life had brought her: and though poor even to indigence, there was light in the aged face when she mentioned their Mother Jane. "She always taught us how we might have joy," was the simple testimony rendered to a life then over. "And none of us can't go back on that; we've had it in us. It come to us with the Lord's blessing; and we was never so near together to all about us like as we was with her."

Yet perhaps no one was so great a lover of solitude as was she, under whose mothering care this family life had found nourishment. Even when her family was about her

Jane kept strange hours, different from the rest. She was one who needed but little sleep : night itself rested her ; and the repose of things lying around entered and gave refreshment to body and soul.

She was still strong to labour, doing in addition to her maternal duties the full day's work of a man. She was now nearly sixty years of age, and still, in spite of aches and pains and occasional accidents, had not known a day's illness. It was told of her, by some who had seen, that when the labouring power of the community diminished, she would go out by stealth into the field at night—dig, hoe, and plant, and at set of moon return for whatever brief spell of rest remained before the early rising of her followers. This was especially at the time when, because of reduced numbers, they rented no more than a single field—the one next to the barn.

One night returning to the fold in the small hours, Jane saw in the moon-shadow of the building something that moved and seemed alive. It was of lightish colour and went on fours, but was not one of the goats : she had just seen those elsewhere.

"Whatever's that ?" she exclaimed aloud, and went up to it.

The figure of a man stood up before her. "Hush your noise !" he said. He held a faggot of wood and swung it threateningly.

Jane spoke him mild :

"Come away into the light and let's look at you. Who are you ?"

"I'm——" The man peered cautiously to right and left ; then he stepped out into the open.

"I'm an escaped prisoner, that's what I am," he said.

"What d'you come here for ?"

"I want food."

"You can have that."

"I want clothes too."

"You can have them."

He came close, and peered into her face. "You aren't telling me no lies ?"

"Do I look like it?" said Jane, facing up to him.
"Come in!"

She led him through the sleeping camp and into the barn. The unpartitioned end, kept for their communal gatherings, was solitary. She struck a light.

"Sit down," she said, and brought him food. He ate reavenously.

Warm water still stood in a pot among the dead embers. She filled a pail, loosed off his boots and some ragged remnants of socks, and started to bathe his feet.

He drew a hissing breath as the operation commenced; but presently it gave him relief.

"You've come a long way by the look of 'em," said Jane, as she applied her fomentations.

"Aye."

"How long have you been out?"

"Near a week."

"It's been rough weather for you."

"I didn't come expecting to enjoy myself," said the man.

"To improve yourself, I suppose?"

"What d'you mean?"

"Prison don't improve anybody."

"So you've the sense to know that, have you?"

"I've been there myself," said Jane.

"God!" the man exclaimed, in satisfaction at thus coming on one so much a fellow-creature. "What was you in for?"

"Interferingness," Jane told him.

"You might call anything that," said the other.

"You might," she retorted. "I don't ask what you was in for. Did you do it?"

"Yes," he grunted.

"How long have you been?"

"This time?—five years."

"So?" Here, then, was a confirmed character. "And altogether?"

"'Twas for life."

Jane looked at him well and hard, for she knew what this meant.

"Oh, you did, did you?" she said at last. "Well, it's a thing one don't never forget. And you was in before, you say?"

"Makes twenty-three years, since I was a boy."

"That's a waste of any man," said Jane. "What folks are!"

She went to the community's store, got out change of raiment to replace the prison garb in which for a week he had lain underground, gave him a razor wherewith to shave himself, a parcel of food, two shillings for his pocket, and her blessing.

"Love God," she said to him at parting. "He's made it a bit hard for you, I know, as you haven't got man to help you. But if you'll give some other a hand as wants it, when you get the chance, I'll take it friendly of you."

The man gave her his.

"I'm sorry I can't do more," said Jane. "You've got a long way before you. Give me a thought now and again: I shall think of you."

"My 'eart bleeds for you!" said the man with quaint fervour; for indeed he was no saint. "However you come about to be alive beats me! What are you?"

"I'm a Bird of Paradise," said Jane, "but I'm beginning to moult. I've lost wellnigh all my tail feathers already, and I shan't lay no more eggs."

CHAPTER XIII

THE DOOR OF THE SHEEP

JANE had to confess to the community what she had done. She did so with characteristic abruptness.

Laying the convict's garb on the Table of Testimony—"A runaway prisoner was here last night," she said; "and I gave him a push on."

They looked at her puzzled, waiting to be more informed.

"You mean you told him to be off," said Jacob at last.

"I did that," replied Jane, "and I helped him on his way. She pointed to the cast-off raiment: "His clothes wanted changing," she explained.

"Did you know who he was, then, Mother Jane?" inquired an apologetic one, striving to discern the motive for so rash a deed.

"I didn't know him from Adam," she owned; "he was just a poor sinner who'd had to pay. They'd driven him more than he'd got strength for, that's all."

"Ah! but he was a fugitive from Justice," objected Jacob. "He was fleeing from the wrath of God."

"I don't know about that," said Jane. "He was fleeing from the wrath of man. 'Tisn't always the same thing. I helped him anyway."

"But that was confounding a felony!" It was Jacob who again spoke.

"I'd a deal rather do that than confound my own conscience," said Jane.

"It was against the law."

"I haven't a doubt of it. If it had only been an act of charity and nothing else, I shouldn't be telling you about it."

"But, Mother," inquired yet another," won't the police be after him?"

"I'd be surprised if they weren't."

Jacob stood up and addressed her with solemn formality.

"Sister Sterling, I think as you've done wrong."

"'Twouldn't be the first time," said Jane. "I did as I thought right."

"But you've broke the law."

"If we don't break the law sometimes, we'd be broke ourselves. Laws didn't all come down from Heaven ready made; and they don't all take us there, neither. The Law murders men's souls for 'em when it suits its book. Twenty-three years he'd been in prison, that man, and he wasn't old."

"P'raps he'd stolen," said Jacob.

"P'raps he had," said Jane.

"He might have been a murderer."

"He might 'a been that too."

"And you let him go?"

"Ah—what was left of him, poor soul."

"I don't think that was right."

"I don't blame you," said Jane.

"Why ever did you tell us about it, Mother?" pleaded one of the women. "We needn't 'a known. You could have burned them clothes, or buried 'em."

"I buried clothes once before," said Jane. "Hark to me; now I've something to tell you. Once I killed a man. It was never found out. Whether it was a sin, or whether it wasn't a sin, it come to my conscience when I was up against that man—was I to treat him different to what I'd treated myself? If I didn't believe the law'd do me any good, why should I believe it'd do him? Twenty-three years: he'd had that anyhow. 'That's enough,' I said; and I let him go."

A gentle horror was over the minds of the community. They gazed upon their Mother with apprehensions impeded by love.

"Are you saying this to try our faith, Mother?" asked one.

"I am," said Jane.

"But is it the truth?"

"God's truth."

"Sounds more like the Devil's," said Jacob.

"He's the father of lies," replied Jane; "I've no dealings with him."

"But you say you once killed a man?"

"I did."

"Did you do it in anger?"

"I was angry: I don't deny."

"But you repented of it."

"I repented of my anger against him; but I never told on myself—not so as to be believed."

Jacob heaved a profound sigh of self-commiseration at the company he found himself in.

"Ah, we're all miserable sinners!" he said.

"I ain't miserable," retorted Jane.

His head went on shaking. She had done for herself with him now. But the investigation must go on; the congregation had better know all.

"What did you do for him?"

"Who? The man I killed, d'you mean?"

"Him as you let go."

Jane told them all she had done. "You've got to forgive me for it," she said; "I done what I felt right. 'Twas no use waking you all. He wanted them things worse than any of we; and the food too. To see him eating was a treat."

"And you gave him money," said Jacob then.

"Two shillings."

Jacob took upon him to sense the meeting.

"We've got to say it, Sister; we don't think you've done right."

"You've a right to your thoughts," said Jane. "If I'd took it without telling you, I'd be ashamed."

Jane took up the clothes from the Table of Testimony. "It's time we started work," she said.

What happened next is told by one who was there:

"Half an hour after, the Mother come up the field with

the convict's clothes on her. They was far too big for her poor thin body, and she'd got 'em all tied round with string. She didn't say nothing; we was digging up potatoes and making buries of 'em; and she come and work alongside of the rest. But we all kept looking at her, we couldn't help; she'd got a wonderful face of peace, and a smile for all. Jacob put down his barrer and went out of the field, but he was the only one. They was horrid clothes, as you may know: an ugly clay colour with broad arrows all over them, and they did make the Mother look a guy—worse than a scarecrow she was. And presently seeing her dear body wear them marks of shame, first one and then another we began crying, so as we couldn't go on with the work: and at last we all went up to her and asked her to go in and take 'em off again.

"She stood still for a while and looked at us, quiet and sweet—very beautiful she looked; and I believe then she knew; she knew the end was come. And all at once as she stood there she began speaking to us, and we all standing round her; and the others, that wasn't with us there in the field, they heard of it and they come out too. But Jacob, he didn't come back with the rest; and the children were all at school.

"She put out her arms, held them up like the cross, then dropped 'em again. 'I have slain a man to my wounding,' she said, 'and a young man to my hurt.' So we all thought then she was going to tell us more of the thing she'd spoke about: but it wasn't of herself at all. 'Twas other murder and killing she meant then—the murder of men's souls done by the law: the wickedness and the cruelty and the folly of it. She said prisons didn't belong to Christ any more than brothels did. She said there was no more love in the one than in the other; and that prison was worse because it was run by men as thought they was doing God a service. She said the Church was a prison too, trying to prison Christ, and not let Him be free. 'Peter's a great gaoler,' she said, 'him with his keys.' We didn't understand all she said; but we understood some of it; and she told us last that until we went into the

prisons and made them bright and beautiful with the love of God, we was all sharers together, makers and ministers of sin. And she made us understand that the young man whose slaying she'd spoke about wasn't just any single one as you might know or name, but all the lives of them that the world has done harm to, and all the generations that was to come, and the driving of 'em to evil ways; and the slaying of souls and bodies done under the law.

"We knew then why she'd let the prisoner go, and we saw plain what was in her heart; but some of us was afraid, because she'd broke the law, and people might come to hear of it.

"When we'd done morning's work, she went back and took off the things, and in the afternoon the police come. Jacob had gone then, and he'd taken all our money with him, there wasn't a doubt. Before they come something was brought that had to be paid for. The Mother went to the box and found it empty. She put it down on the Table of Testimony before us all. 'Empty,' she says. 'There was fifteen pounds or thereabouts in it last night. I took two shillings without asking, but who took all these?' Then she laughed just in her old way. 'Lord show us the humour of it!' she said. We'd often heard her say that before; and that was the last time."

It was the word of farewell.

When the police came they already had the facts. They did not need them: Jane told them everything. She gave them back the clothes which belonged to government; but she did not supply any very accurate description of the garments she had exchanged for them. "There was trousers," she said, "and there was a coat too, and a couple of shirts. Colour? They hadn't much colour in 'em, not what you could name, though they might have had once; but they wasn't meant for going to church in. Hat? I give him two to choose from: but they wasn't the sort of hat you could describe neither. I give him a bit of soap too, he was glad of that. I can tell you what that was like 'twas our own make."

The police took her away with them, and the community stood to see her go.

"We watched her down the lane, past the cottages at the end," said the informant whose words have been already quoted: "and when she come to the turning toward Ilmington and was just going out of sight, she faced round and clapped her hands to us and waved 'em like wings. She hadn't got anything on her head, and all her hair shone white—wonderful hair she'd got. That's the last we saw of her."

At Ilmington she was formally charged with her offence, and thereafter remanded from week to week. She gave straight answers to the magistrate's questions, but they did not much help; and the man whom she had let loose upon society was still not to be found.

When the presiding magistrate told her that she stood charged with a serious offence, and one which might lead to very grave consequences, she remained unmoved.

Finding the court as good a place as any to preach in, she gave him something of her gospel, and owned that she herself had already been in prison many times. This was gratuitous and uncalled for, and the magistrate being a J.P. and an amateur in the forms he sat to administer, asked her "What for?"

"For interferingness," she told him. "It's what we all do one way or another: trying to reform other people's characters instead of our own."

This was before her second remand. A doctor was ordered to examine into her mental condition; and he, being kind and charitable, knowing something of her also by repute, reported as he thought best for her. She was a little bit mad, he told the magistrate, touched with religious mania, but otherwise quite harmless, and in the main sufficiently responsible for her actions.

The Justices sitting upon that country bench were human enough to like her. Her reported self-accusation of murder, which nobody believed, helped them to take a lenient view of her offence. The prisoner whose escape she had assisted had done no murder in the neighbourhood nor could even a

robbery be traced to him ; so, after holding her in fairly kind keeping for over a month, the Law let her go ; and in the dusk of a dull November evening Jane walked home again.

She found her community away ; the place was empty, and all doors wide. But in the grass compound behind the barn one of the goats remained tethered, in a spot which it had not yet eaten bare.

That restriction of the animal's liberty gave the only hint that the premises were still under human supervision. Everything else bore the mark of desertion or neglect.

Jane walked down to the nearest cottage to ask what had become of her flock.

"They've all gone," the woman told her.

"Can you tell me where ? "

"Most of 'em to friends, I fancy : or back into the east counties where they come from. But there's one still about—her you call Sister Mary Anne."

"Where is she ? " Jane inquired.

"She's gone over to Sarah Lorford's as was, being afraid to sleep there all alone : but now and again she comes over in the day to fetch things."

While she spoke a small boy came and peeped at Jane from behind his mother's skirt.

"You've been in prison, haven't you ? " he inquired in ostentatious curiosity.

"I have," said Jane. "Now they've let me go."

The woman stopped the boy's chatter, and touched with compunctious pity gave her some bread and butter and a cup of tea ; and presently Jane went back to her deserted home.

In the morning Sister Mary Anne arrived upon the scene.

She met Jane in a curious flutter, a little ashamed, divided between tears and silly chuckles of laughter. She had much to say : the events were complicated, and her mind embraced them all.

She started first on that which most concerned her. "I don't know what you'll say to me," she began ; "I'm going to be married."

"Well, that's good news for somebody," said Jane. "Who is it?"

"It's Sarah's father, where I'm staying now—Brother Matthew as was ; but he isn't well, like what he used to be. And how to tell you it all I'm sure I don't know—what with everything that's been happening first and last ; for there wasn't one of us as knew what was best to be done, after we'd been left with things like they had been left ; and the police too, and everybody knowing of it, and Sarah coming over to ask what it could all mean, and bringing the child with her ; and he past his work, so they can't afford to keep him any longer, she says. And over at Ilmington they've got a very nice alms-house with a vacancy to it, belonging to the Church, because somebody has both died there within a few days of each other ; but it only holds marriage couples, so singles can't go by themselves, and somewhere to go to is what we've all of us got to find : and difficult enough it is. For days and days after you was gone we just sat and looked at each other, trying to make up our minds ; and you wouldn't believe, if you hadn't seen it, how many the tears fell down ; and we all saying we didn't want to go, though some did, because they had to. So, then, he asked me would I marry him, so as to get the vacancy, because the Vicar told him he could have it if he was married ; and I told him yes, I would ; and, of course, we'd all settled to go then, and we'd shared out all the potatoes, and blankets, and the bedding and things, for how could any of us tell what was to be done if you wasn't coming back ? And as I says to 'em, 'Nobody knows what she'll be charged with,' having said what you had said : and the children coming crying home from school because of what hateful-spoken boys had been telling to 'em, and the people all about not like what they used to be. So when they asked could he come a married man, he said yes, he was ; and he went over to Ilmington and see 'em about it. And I'm sure many of us was wanting to go over and see you too, for we all said so, but we was afraid if we did we'd be taken for witnesses having heard you say it ; and that—we'd rather have told a lie about it than do you

any harm. So he went, and we didn't, and he didn't : and it was on market day. And that night a lot of 'em come for the fun of it and drove all the goats down the lane, and no getting 'em back till next morning too late to milk 'em before the children were off to school, because we didn't find out. And they said to him, was she respectable, and whereabouts did she live, and was she Church ? And he said I was anything he was ; and I was more respectable than him, he said, and the sister of an undertaker, he says. So he told 'em that. And I'd always been very good to his daughter, he say, and always done the proper thing, as I'm sure so I have ; and if I hadn't a roof over my head and nobody to speak for me, I couldn't say no different. But he said to me as the Vicar told him as I was good enough so long as I was Church like him ; and thankful I was, for most of 'em had gone then : and we'd shared all the things between us—so far as could be—thinking that the only right way. And he come and took a barrow-load of potatoes down to Sarah's and it took him all day and he had to go to bed after, and Sarah not to eat 'em, he says, because they belong to me and him ; and she's got another baby coming, she tell me—and we shall take 'em with us : and it will be strange me at my age sleeping in a double-bed along o' him."

As Mary Anne's small panoramic views threatened to have no end—"When are you going to marry him ?" interrupted Jane.

"To-morrow, Mother ; and we are going to be done in church ; because, of course, he goes there now, and the Vicar expects it of us."

"Wish you joy !" said Jane—"both of you."

She cast her eyes around on all the emptyings and leavings with which the once orderly interior was strewn.

"There's a lot of clearing to be done here," she said.

In this Mary Anne seemed to see an underlying implication upon her caretaking, and once more her words flowed.

"And I'm sure I wish I could stay and help you," she said ; "and I'm sure as I did everything I could by myself alone, only one didn't know where to begin, not knowing

whether it would be any use to any one. And you mustn't believe, Mother, as we did it without thinking about you too : for as I says to 'em—"If she was to come back, it wouldn't be the things as she'd miss, or grudge 'em to any of us nor to others either, but she's got to be thought for like all the rest ' ; and they said yes, you had. So now there's ever such a lot of turnips and parsnips and potatoes put away for you in the shed, and the door nailed up so as they shan't be stole ; and they left one of the goats in case, and some one to have the milk for the milking of it till you come ; and there's other things too ; and if you didn't, they said I was to come and fetch 'em, or else somebody else was. But that was a week ago, and now they've all gone except me : and if I see you I was to give you their love, they said, and they'll always remember you, and hope you will them."

Mary Anne stopped to take breath.

"The Lord have 'em in His safe keeping!" said Jane. "He's done it all for a good showing, I haven't a doubt."

"Yes, Mother," said Mary Anne, "so He 'ave, I'm sure ; and I think I shall get to like him well enough, when I'm got use to him. But what's become of Jacob I'm sure I don't know nor does nobody else ; and with everything so changed from what you've been accustomed to, you hardly know what to think about anything."

She tried once more to voice the apologies of the absent ones.

"Change is good for 'em," said Jane ; "they've got the seed, if they'll know how to use it. You didn't none of you think of going to Mr. Hebron, I suppose ? "

"Oh yes, Mother, some of us did. They thought of that first. But he's away now, and has been this long time ; he's gone up to London, they say, because he's standing for Parliament."

"Him at his age!" exclaimed Jane. "He ought to know better. But there, you can't tell ; everything is the Lord's showing, if we only take it right."

Incidentally it explained something. During her incarceration she had wondered a little at having received no

word or sign from him—and he a man of influence who might have befriended her. After some probings of doubt she had faithfully laid question of it aside : now this news came to satisfy her.

“So they’ve all gone,” she said, as once more her eyes took in the emptiness of that loved abode. “It ’ud ’a been good to see ’em again just once, but it wasn’t to be. The Law don’t reckon of other people’s time once its got hold of ’em. Anyway, my time’s cut out here. Will you stay and have a bit with me ? ”

But Mary Anne had her own new corner of the world waiting for her and much preparation to be done. Out of the small store of household requisites left by the community for her own use, Jane bestowed on her a parting gift, and watched her with her fat load trundle urgently down the road, as wise a virgin as ever entered into the marriage bliss which sanguine life can still provide for septuagenarians.

Jane looked on the disarray that lay around in all directions.

“They did wipe their feet while they was about it ! ” she commented leniently. Then she started clearing and tidying. It took her all day.

Evening closed in, and no one had come to disturb her solitude. She went out and talked to the goat for a while. “You’ve been having a lonely time, have you ? ” she remarked, as the beast straining on its rope butted cajolingly against her. She tethered it within reach of cover for the night, gave it a few parsnips, and went within doors again.

The stores left to her showed thoughtful selection. She found candles and oil. Having trimmed a lamp she kindled it and hung it in its accustomed place. From the added windows which the community had opened in the old walls a dim light fell over the interior ; but except in the centre where the lamp burned, everything was vague, and as she stood and looked around the shadows bulked and deepened.

She was tired, for prison had weakened her, and her back ached with labour ; resting her two hands on the Table of Testimony she bent forward, so as to get ease. Her eyes fell on the surface beneath, it needed polishing. She took a

cloth and began rubbing it. It was an old table and the wood was beautiful. She stooped and looked into the grain : here and there were scars and indentations, cracks also, and flaws ; for it had borne much service. Yet the service of man had not occupied all its years ; it came of an old tree ; and the story of that part of its life still lay in the grain. There was its true character, unchanged, substantially unchangable, man's use had but brought to the surface something which lay embedded deep.

She stood up and looked across it into the darkened barn that stretched beyond ; the rays of the lamp fell softly upon her face ; and through the visionary gaze of her eyes soft thoughts crept out and kept them company.

Her face showed them no solitary look : a warm light burned in it, and she stood a great while motionless but did not speak. Only as she came to herself again she seemed by a gesture of blessing to dismiss the unseen congregation she had gathered round her.

This was Jane's last sermon. Wonderfully rested, but with eyes weighed down by sleep, she reached up her hand and turned out the light, and in the grey darkness groped her way to the bed she had made for herself.

CHAPTER XIV

TOWERS OF STRENGTH

MR. HEBRON did not get into Parliament. He came back with only a whisper of voice, very sorry for himself, very much in need of rest, and with a new understanding of English crowds.

"I have been living in a strange land," he said. "I talked sense to them in a foreign tongue which they did not understand; I was a joke and I fell flat. They put me bottom of the poll."

He had come to see Jane in her solitude, and the cheerfulness of her mind was good medicine for his soul. "What are you going to do now?" he inquired.

"Just rest," she told him. "It's what I've been wanting. I wouldn't have believed it possible; but the Lord's found a way."

"Where do you mean to be?"

"Where I am, unless you want me to go."

Very cordially Mr. Hebron begged her to stay. When she asked him to take back the field, he offered to let her have it rent free; but that she declined. The small patch by the barn was enough for her.

"I hear that while I was away you got into trouble with the authorities," he said presently. "Why did you not write to me?"

"What for?" said Jane.

"I have a seat upon that Bench," he replied. "I would have come."

"You and me claiming acquaintance in that court 'ud 'a been a funny sight!" said Jane. "Well, I did without you; and you've kept your character: I haven't."

"I approve of what you did. An escaped prisoner is, at all events, a rebel against society as at present constituted."

"I didn't think of him that way," said Jane.

"How, then?"

"He was a sheep as hadn't got a shepherd—same as you."

Jane's tribulations had not altered her, and the sound of her dialectics pleased him.

For a while people saw this strangely assorted couple meeting upon the road and walking together. To some it was a sign that Mr. Hebron in his old age was 'going queer.'

"They don't talk much to each other," it was reported; "they just walk side by side, rather slow—his pace not hers." So in the first weeks of winter people used to meet them. Then one day of hard frost Mr. Hebron slipped, straining a tendon; he could no longer go up the stairs of his tower. This filled him with resentment; members of his household reported that his temper was very trying, he was more full of fads than ever.

To have to sit with his foot up hurt his pride; and while thus crippled he did not ask for Jane to come and see him.

Meanwhile nobody went to see Jane. All by herself she took down the huts and sheds that had been reared along the edge of the plantation, sold the timber, and a little later, the other side of Christmas, paid the full rent to the estate agent. The field and the wood were now no longer hers; the barn she still occupied by Mr. Hebron's favour, but to nobody did she owe a penny. It was said of her that from this date on she never went into a shop to buy anything. Money ceased to exist for her, and somehow she managed to do without it.

One night early in January there came storm—rain and hurricane. Like all big things that breathed or moved it had an attraction for her; and when about midnight it tore a patch out of the barn's thatched roof she got up to look at it.

The night was not so dark as the weather tried to make it. When she went out of doors the wind knocked her down.

She sought her goat, and finding the creature quite anxious about itself sat down by it in the shed, and gave it such comfort as she could by warm contact and words of encouragement.

Somewhere in the small hours there came a loud crash ; one of the old trees had fallen across the barn, tearing down a portion of the roof.

"Hallo, Nanny," said Jane, "if it hadn't been for you and your bleatings that might have come down on my head ! It's the Lord's showing my being here along o' you."

A moment later a heavy rattling shock, but not like thunder, reverberated through the darkness ; it seemed to come from not far away. The sense that it meant something brought Jane to her feet. "Whatever's that ?" she exclaimed. She went out into the open to listen : but the careless unconcentrated fury of the storm was everywhere about her, and the night gave back no answer to her human interrogation of its blind ends.

Toward morning the storm had expended its strength ; and Jane, stiff and cold from her night's lodging in the goat's shed and not having slept much, went across to see what damage had been done to her dwelling. She found the two middle stays of the roof-tree had gone, carrying a central stretch of thatch with them : the two ends remained intact. The tree had fallen alongside the rear wall ; one big arm lay across. Things might have been much worse.

All within was filled with wreckage—beams of wood, broken rafters, rubble, and straw.

"There's plenty of fuel anyway," remarked Jane : but breakfast was a more immediate difficulty. Had any fire been left, she thought, the place would have been burned down.

She set to work to rescue her milking-can ; that way at least she could get the rudiments of a meal.

As she crossed the barn yard, a labourer going to work in the dim hurling dusk of the abating storm, cried to her that Mr. Hebron's tower was down. Later she was told by some one returning from the scene that no lives had been

lost ; but everybody at the Mount, and near about scared out of their beds, and Mr. Hebron making himself ill over it.

"Ah," said Jane compassionately, "it'll be a Lord's showing for him ! I must go and see him."

She went at midday, only to be told that he was too ill to see anybody. He had gone out at first creep of light and cried like a child among the ruins ; then indoors, and taken to his bed, and the doctor sent for.

She went and looked at the fallen splendour lying shattered across the grounds, broken from terrace to terrace in grey masses of ruin. Two-thirds of the tower had come away and the whole of one side ; the rest stood. "My barn makes a better showing than that," mused Jane. "It'll take a year to clear all this away. I wonder what he'll do with it : bury it in consecrated ground, I suppose."

She saw him a week later, on his feet again. He was then an altered man. His thoughts were all astray, he did not seem to remember when they had last met.

"So you've lost your sheep ?" he said.

"I have that, in a way."

"And my tower is down. Do you think you will find them again ?"

"The Lord will find them," she told him.

"It was my doing to begin with, I am afraid : for I took some of them myself. But you never bore me any grudge."

"I trained 'em to be free," said Jane.

"Have you seen any of them again—lately, I mean ?"

"I'm always seeing 'em," she answered—"in my mind's eye. I'm full of 'em ; they're part of my life."

"Ah !" He drew his breath sadly, a little painfully. "My case is different," he said ; "a great part of my life has gone : it has all fallen down in ruin."

"It went with a will when it did go."

"But I wasn't in it."

"No, you wasn't : else you wouldn't be here now."

"I wasn't in it," he said again. "I can't help feeling that I've missed something."

He stood gently ruminating, then went on: "I always wanted to be high up when I died—as high as possible."

"P'raps you wouldn't have died before you got to the bottom," said Jane.

"My mind would have been high up," he said. "I should have been there where I belonged."

"Yes, I think I understand," Jane said kindly.

"And now I can't bear to look out of the window," he said. "The whole place—is a gap."

He walked away depressed, not saying good-bye to her.

The coachman's wife at the lodge saw them part. "What do you think of him?" she asked.

"He's upset," said Jane—"more than his tower, almost. That coffin of his had been standing on end so many years, he thinks it made a mistake when it went to earth and him not in it."

"He says he hasn't time to start building it again," observed Mrs. Roberts. "That's what troubles him: he's all at ends—says he feels he's old. He never 'ud own that before."

"If he could only be happy with it," said Jane, "what a showing to him it would be!"

But he could not see it so; from that time on he ailed and grew feeble. As he said, he missed something. His wife came to stay with him, and was kind, doing all she could to cheer: but she could not compensate for the loss of his tower, that more heavenly Babel into which he had been used to escape from the modern confusion of tongues.

It was nearly a month later when he sent word for Jane to come to him. She saw him then more changed than ever.

He lay on his bed in an Eastern richness of costume, but looking very frail, and his eyes were without light.

"Mrs. Sterling," he said, after greeting, "I have always felt that you were an exalted character, that you had found yourself, so that you would not be afraid of falling. That is a great thing to have achieved. So I want you to come and sit by me, and talk to me about high things—if you will be so good. I wonder did you ever climb mountains?"

"Only a little one," said Jane, and told him of the Hill of Difficulties.

"Then did you never stand on great heights?"

She narrated some of her New York experiences, when she had been in the building trade.

"All that sounds terrible," he said, "that building for crowds. It's the Tower of Babel again, the tower of tongues. What man wants, when he rises, is solitude, expansion—to be alone."

"That's the fullest thing of all," said Jane.

"Eh?"

"When there's nothing else to see, you see the beauty of the Lord then. It's a great showing to them as has eyes."

Mr. Hebron turned to her his mild and weary gaze.

"Mother Jane," he said, "I wish sometimes I had a Lord like yours. He strikes me as a—well, as a Gentleman. I don't find that about Him in the Churches—not quite."

"Perhaps you've looked in the wrong corners of 'em," said Jane.

"I dare say. But yours has always seemed to do things in the nicest possible way."

"He has done that," said Jane.

"Perhaps you made things easy for Him."

"He done that for me."

"It's the same thing, Mrs. Sterling. I think you have influenced Him." He lay looking at her, benevolent, exhausted, then added—"For you have influenced *me*."

She could not but smile then. "It's a showing," was all she said.

"And I wanted to tell you," he went on, "the barn will still be yours. Nobody will turn you out when I'm gone."

A week later, very gently and composedly he fell into his last sleep. A wagoner brought Jane word of it as she stood at her gate.

"You've heard Mr. Hebron's dead I suppose? They say he couldn't hold up his head after his tower was down."

"Ah, he can hold it up now," said Jane.

The man stared at her.

“What do you mean?”

“He’s far above it now. His tower showed me the light first: but now it’s him. I didn’t ever know how fond I was of him till now.”

“He’ll have a grand funeral,” said the man.

“He had that,” said Jane, “when his tower fell down.”

CHAPTER XV

‘HER THOUGHTS ARE FLOCKS’

THENCEFORTH Jane lived alone. People spoke of her as ‘the woman,’ and now and then when they were in a difficulty they would go to her; but something strange and mysterious in the personality, once so moving and alert now grown so still, held them at arm’s length. They doubted whether she were quite sane.

Her dress was made from a couple of labourer’s smocks, girt in at the waist, the lower one extending almost to the feet. Over them she wore an old shawl, and for one half of the year went barefoot. That was the habit more than any other which severed her from respectability.

Before her manifestation of poverty had become so pronounced, people were more willing to make use of her. One of the genteel class moving into the neighbourhood, and hearing of her as “a decent body but very poor,” came to look at her, and seeing a sort of bargain in one so indigent, offered her a day’s work.

“I’ll be glad to help you,” said Jane.

“You will get all your meals,” said her employer, “and some food to take home with you. Come as early as you like.” It was the indication of the wage she might expect—for one day her starved body should be well fed; beyond that it did not seem that such skin and bone could be made profitable.

Jane came bringing her own food with her, did a man’s work on the unkempt garden she was set to clear, and left word that she would come again if they wanted her.

But the bargain was too stark; gentility hearing that its meals had been refused exploited her no more; it could

not take as a gift what it was not ashamed to secure by a pretence of charity.

Some of those hours had been made sweet to Jane by the shy watchings of a little girl belonging to the house. Either the little one was of a reserved disposition or was under orders not to speak. Seeing Jane clearing a bed of flowering weeds she came and picked off some of them by the neck, laying them aside as things to be spared. Then a voice called her in. Afterwards from the lane Jane saw bright eyes under a red hood peeping at her, and without words she and the child were friends.

Nobody who asked Jane a service was ever refused ; now and then home-bound mothers, having to leave their children, would ask her to go and keep an eye on them, or would bring them to the wicket gate leading to the barn, and there deposit them till called for. But this was only when other neighbours were not available ; where there was so little exchange of social amenity, a difficulty of payment came in.

One woman, a near neighbour, with many children, having to leave her family for the day, sought Jane’s aid ; and as a return gave her an old pair of stockings rolled up in a ball. In the foot of one of them, as she came to undo them, Jane found a penny. The gift given so shyly was no doubt kindly meant ; but it did not stay long a burden upon Jane’s hands. Apparently somebody else as well as the giver knew of it. In the course of the day, a small boy came and hung on Jane’s gate, making bold demand. “ Give I a penny, missus ! ” he pleaded, and the penny was given him. A while after, the boy’s mother came on him, tossing it with anticipatory delight before guzzling it. “ Where did you get that ? ” she demanded.

“ The woman gave it me.”

“ Oh, she did ? ”

Thus expeditiously was the penny returned into the family it came from.

Word of this went to neighbours, and helped to confirm the growing opinion that Jane was a bit ‘ touched.’

She became a local oddity ; and, as a curiosity which had

passed its use, a remnant of her old fame returned to her. Guide-books quoted her as one of the local sights, and drew tourists into the neighbourhood to look at her. The woman-hermit and her broken barn were snapshotted, and appeared in the photograph shops of seaside places near by. Chars-à-bancs driving past drew up at the corner of the lane for those who wished to turn aside and make her acquaintance. Approaching the ruined barn covered by trailing roses they would gaze through the gate at the small wooden shed with its green canvas covering reared about the big fireplace in the end wall, and would watch her quiet domestic movements within, hoping to see her 'do something,' or to get into talk with her.

But to these sightseers the 'high trembles' they asked for were not exhibited; Jane's days of manifestation were over, praise lay quiet within her withered breast, and the wells of laughter bubbled no more.

Now and again, if a face among those strangers attracted her, she would come down to the gate offering flowers, but would take no payment for them. "God is in the flowers," she said to one who, pitying her poverty, tried to insist. "I don't sell my Maker for money, not to no man."

In holiday times when the numbers of excursionists increased she spoke to them less—sometimes avoided meeting them. Parties came and were disappointed: she gave them no funny tales to take away, and when they tried to lead her on she answered with an indirectness which caused them to think that deafness afflicted her. "Aye, fine weather for holiday-makers," she would answer when they asked her 'where God was to be found,' or with an eye that travelled unregardingly past grinning faces would look to see what course down the lane her goat had taken, and quick of stride would go out through their midst seeking it, and forget to return.

Her face and form had then become thinner than ever, her abundant hair snow-white; but her dark eyes had still the burnished look in them which people had noted of old and sometimes feared.

Locally folk had reason sometimes to be glad of her.

At hay-time or harvest she would come into a field and work all day with the rest, often for a week at a time, but would take no pay for it. The farmer she benefited would occasionally send a sack of potatoes to her gate, or some other bit of produce of which he reckoned she must be in want; and at last told her to go into his fields and help herself as she liked. This was when, in the last year of her life, she had ceased to till her own bit of ground. Vegetation had then entered the walls of the barn; and flowers, weeds, and vegetables grew together in a wild profusion. As her powers of hand diminished, where culture failed grass grew.

People often had cause to wonder how she lived and kept herself so clean. It was said that she ate strange things. Early risers saw her going and returning laden from the wild; she gleaned, she natted, she gathered roots; but she never entered a shop or bought anything; her goat gave her milk.

In the spring of 1882 fever broke out in the group of cottages hard by, and was traced to the contamination of sewage-sodden wells. Then for several weeks she conveyed water in a wheeled tub from her own spring to the harassed villagers who otherwise must have gone almost without; and agreed readily for pipes to be laid down the lane to carry from that untainted source a new supply for their needs. But except at such times of occasional usefulness, and out of the kindness it engendered, she was left much alone; and her reputation to the outside world of visitors was a diminishing one.

One day word of human need having come to her, she brought her goat to a neighbour's cottage, and asked them to keep it a few days, with the milk to pay for the trouble. Then she went over to Ilmington to help Mary Anne to die, and with what cheer she could muster in that poor pensioned and now solitary body, saw her through her last pains into the better class of parish grave with which church charity provided her.

In that service of one, Jane seemed to gather to her breast by a symbolic gesture the whole of her separated

flock, and on the homeward road they lived in her anew ; she called them all by their names, and heard in reply the babble of their bleatings round her.

These stirrings of the heart made her feel young again, and her feet touched the road as a musician's hand the recovered strings of a remembered instrument. She arrived home not tired. "The Lord has given me my legs again !" she cried in happy thanksgiving, for at this time rheumatism often crippled her.

It would be difficult to tell all the solitary joys by which, in these last years, Jane lived and moved towards the end awaiting her.

This came to her one day : a faint click at the gate, and a small voice calling in distress, "Mammy, mammy !" For the light of Jane's fire showed through the open door, and down the grass-grown path ; and her own figure in the dimness of the interior may well have had the homely look responsive to a child's need.

She found grief awaiting her ; a little four-year-old, distressful with indignant tears, very wet and miserable.

"He pushed me in !" she wailed, not specifying : the explanation was enough. Jane took the child in to her fireside—unclothed, warmed and rubbed her, afterwards drying her things for her ; and while she did so, the child—its naked body cuddled cosily in her shawl—prattled of its misadventure, of the rude boy who pushed her into the big puddle and then run away—and so presently, discharged of her grievance, slept.

Jane sat very still, holding that restoration of life, gazing at it with fond eyes ; and into her ears from a spiritual distance came the gay barking of a young dog. But there was no grief, no grief at all now for the memory it evoked. The damp hair waved again into vaporous tendrils, light and shifting, recovering their pale radiance of gold. The soft come-and-go of the contentedly taken breath touched her with its warmth ; and her spirit, without hunger and without greed, took the blessing as it came and was satisfied.

After a while the sleep which had lain heavy upon the

tiny form slackened and lifted away ; the eyes looked at her in trustful recognition, the lips smiled. Pushing itself up from her breast the child asked to go home.

She dressed it in its dried clothes, and saw it safely to its mother's gate. The house was not friendly to her—it was a little too well off and genteel : and for a while the child did not come to see her again. But later, unbeknown to its own people, it stole back to her, and so continued for a while a surreptitious visitant, intimate and sweet, from a separate sphere, one wherein Jane was not held in much esteem.

At this period of her life, when the road called her no more, she reverted for many hours at a time to a spiritual exercise which had solaced her days in prison, starting once more to revisit, mentally, places she had known in sojourn, or seen and been drawn to while passing by. The exercise had its special hours, beginning mainly as light decreased, or when the milder effulgence of the moon lit up the solitary expanse of fields lying at her door.

Then, as she sat and gazed into it, the night for her became peopled not so much with humans as with places and things. In these moods she saw with a strange distinctness house wall, and thatch, and winding road ; bare hills, pools in dark earth reflecting sky ; trees standing solitary or in groups ; towns and villages, with emptied streets and drawn blinds ; everything conditioned to that hour of dim-lit obscurity and repose which gave mould to her thoughts.

Then also her mind envisaged men's evening occupations. She saw into the interiors of nailer's shed and blacksmith's forge, and the sudden striking of light on stooped face and bared arm ; saw men at their last shift in a gas-yard quenching coke ; saw in railway sidings drivers raking out their fires, and great engines slide home to bed ; saw tool-watchers camping for the night in their sentry-boxes on upturned roads ; couples loving in the hedge, horses invisible of limb moving ghostly through the rising mist of water-meadows ; brown sails of barges in slow motion through level fields, windmills with resting arms, circling

lights far out at sea, and the dim hazy glimmer of distant towns.

Thus, an unwearied wayfarer, she resumed possession of old haunts, old times, old adventures, activities which had long since quitted the body and the tired limbs, but had not relaxed hold on the brain.

The fact that in those undisturbed hours of night she could actually reconstruct in her brain, as at that moment they were, so many beautiful, companionable, and homely things, and pass without effort from point to point of an earth ever her bosom friend, so uneventfully yet so memorably dear, left no room in her life for the loneliness which kind neighbours imagined must be her lot. Moonlight on grass, on water, on rick, on whitewashed wall, noises of shadowed streams, of pools with leaping fish, of slow-breathing and munching kine, of woods where pheasants rustled in their sleep and rabbits ran, of lone field-spaces where the unending night-jar sat awake : to these things she opened her mind till it was filled—till the spirit of night in distances far away had so absorbed her own that she ceased to be conscious of what lay visibly around her. Rapt away from her material environment she sensed the larger whole.

As she put off possession her freedom grew. At night she never locked her gate ; even the hut in which she slept had no latch to its door. At a push from without it would open : evil or good, anything might enter at will. But evil never came.

Once on a night of rain she awoke, feeling chill, and found curled up against her breast a dog very wet—a shut-out or a stray. He kept her company till morning. When she awoke, he and her breakfast were gone.

CHAPTER XVI

SALVATION COMETH

JANE saw no papers and listened to no gossip ; but one day at speech with a passing neighbour she heard a new and unfamiliar name. The sound of it appealed to her. " The Salvation Army," she queried : " what's that ? "

A rum lot, she was told, out to make a noise and give trouble, who went about the streets with trumpets and drums, playing popular tunes, and calling on sinners to come and be saved. They were militant, it seemed ; occasionally they resisted the police, and got sent to prison ; more often they were mobbed, mocked, jeered at, pelted with mud, subjected to the cock-shyings of an unadaptive crowd. They took it all with a cheerful countenance as part of the day's work.

Jane's face brightened at the news. They had come, she heard, to a far corner of the county, and were causing disturbances in every town they visited. The publicans, the police, and the Church (with true Christian charity not letting left hand know what right hand did) joined forces against them. Thoroughly disreputable, nevertheless they were not to be put down ; irrepressible nuisances, pushed under for one moment, they bobbed up again like cork.

Jane begged a pair of old shoes, and walked sixteen miles to a hill-top market-town to hear a woman in strange Victorian garb preaching at a street corner. Her clothes streamed with eggs roughly delivered from their shells, the sort of eggs that are all yolk ; a dishevelled band of amateur musicians stood round her. The crowd hustled, boys hooted, shopmen stood at their doors and grinned, but she

seemed lifted above her surroundings ; a strange integument of cheerfulness clung to her, and her serenely sanguine face was lit by a smile.

When she had quite said her say and dismounted from the box on which she had been standing, the crowd's attentions relaxed. Jane went up to her, and started to wipe off the egg-drippings.

"They took care not to waste anything," she commented as she did so ; "these wasn't eatable."

"Poor souls, Christ died for 'em all !" said the Salvation lass, and clasping her hands seemed like starting again.

"Dying's a little thing."

The woman stood astonished.

"You don't think He minded dying, do you ?" said Jane. "And if He didn't, why make a noise about it ? It's Him coming to live among 'em was the wonder."

"Ah, but it's the Blood of the Lamb cleanseth from all sin !" exclaimed the other. "It's that you've got to get : it's the Blood that washes us and makes us white."

"The blood is the life," said Jane : "you must get it in your inside. Don't talk about washing in it : it puts people off. But you've got the Lord in you," she went on. "I've come a long way to see you ; and I'm not sure as it wasn't worth it."

"I'm afraid you aren't properly saved, sister," said the woman. "Truly, haven't you found Christ ?"

"Christ ? I doubt whether I know who you mean," said Jane. "There's no two Jim Joneses in the world sees the same ; for we've none of us got the same eyes."

The Salvation woman paused, at a loss how to argue with this strange disputant.

"It's the Light, though, that we see by," she said at last. "That's common to us all : the Light that lighteneth every man."

"Now you've said the true thing," said Jane, "and you've said it beautiful ! You've got the Lord in you, for sure.

"There's light in Hell too," she added ; "you can't have flames without light : praise God for that !"

The woman looked at her aghast. "God forgive you!" she cried. "What are you saying?"

"Ah, you haven't been in Hell as I have," said Jane. "I tell you—the light there is so strong it blinds your eyes. And poor souls blind with the light they can't look at go groping, and think they're in the dark. Hell used to puzzle me badly, till one day I sat down and said the word to myself over and over, hundreds and hundreds of times. 'Hell,' I said, 'Hell, Hell, Hell,' till I got quite friendly with it and familiar-like. Then all of a sudden I started to laugh: I'd got to the bottom of it. And Hell hasn't never troubled me since—not once. Take anything as you don't understand, or are afraid of, and say it over and over, till the sound of it makes you laugh. You've taken the terrors out of it then."

"Poor soul!" said the Salvation lass, and gazed compassionately as on one who had lost her wits. She got no nearer to an understanding of Jane's doctrine; she was afraid of it.

At parting Jane gave her three apples, windfalls she had picked up by the way, and set out on her homeward tramp supperless.

She walked from setting day into rising moon, and before she reached familiar ways its light was high in the heavens, and the shadows of hedges lay blocked on the pallid track that she pressed with weary feet.

Shadows of bedding cottagers showed on yellow blinds, and Jane walked happy through this restful sprinkling of her fellow-humans, peace in her heart above her burning feet that stumbled under her.

Her goat bleated as she unlatched the gate. "Yes, Nanny," she cried, "the Lord's at his old tricks again!"

For a few days thereafter she did not appear, and neighbours going by began to remember that they had not seen signs of her. So presently one went to investigate.

In the hut was a burnt-out fire—the ashes of it still warm, and on the hearth a bannock-cake of home-ground flour, and a pannikin of herb tea.

Jane sat in her chair, head resting on hand, and eyes

closed. The shoes which she had put off were much broken, and her bare feet showed the sores of her long tramp on the road—no matter now to one whose journeys were over.

The body was very stiff when they came to handle it; and they had much ado to get it decently laid to the dimensions of its pauper coffin.

The Church of England, which by reason of its established position, gathers to its cold breast the wastrel dead of modern England, said prayers over her, and expressed in stereotyped terms on behalf of its dear sister departed, a sure and certain trust in the larger hope.

No headstone ever marked the spot where Jane's body was laid. A few years ago the sexton, who had the burying of her, died; and the place where that heart—so faithful in its love of earth and heaven—resumed unhindered allegiance to both alike, is now unknown.

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